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ANSWER TO THE COMMUNICATIONS OF A DEIST, ON THE
STABILITY OF THE LAWS OF NATURE, AS OPPOSED TO
THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS.

To the Editor of the Freethinking Christians' Magazine.

SIR,

THE second letter of your correspondent, "a Deist," on the stability of the laws of nature, is intended as an illustration of the principles advanced in the first. He supposes a case, in order to show the application of those principles (which the reader may find by turning to the number for last month page 63); but surely I am not to inform the superior understanding of this writer, that the supposition of a British consul writing over to England, to tell a foolish story about General Washington appearing in congress, and making a long speech, can bear no parallel to the testimony of the apostles in favour of the resurrection of Jesus.

If it were worth enquiring into the truth or falsehood of a story of this kind, I should not reject it on the supposition of its infringing on the laws of nature; for not having the advantage "a Deist" has, to be in the possession of those laws, I should make shift to settle the matter to the satisfaction of an ordinary mind, like my own, in a more homely manner. I should say such an event forms part of no system—it proposes no end—Washington lived and died like other men—he pretended to no divine commission when living—he held out no hopes to his friends of rising from the grave before the rest of mankind. Here then I am called upon to give credit to a miraculous event, which must either be occasioned by a divine interposition, or emanate physically from some remarkable provision in nature, anticipated by the Deity in the original constitution of things; and yet at the same time offering no moral advantage whatever, except a speech three hours and a half long.

These considerations would be quite sufficient to induce me to wait very patiently for the arrival of American papers, and if they contained no information of the kind, their silence would induce me to discredit the story. In the congress of the United States are men of virtue and information—their assurance would be satisfactory to me, in a point where they could

not be deceived themselves, and could have no advantage in deceiving others. If then a set of men of unimpeached integrity were to declare that Washington had appeared to them after his death, and had revealed certain truths which could in no other way be communicated to man—truths of vital importance to society, calculated to reconcile contending interests—to unite opposing nations—to close the pores of bleeding humanity—to render sacred the rights of man, and secure the liberties and happiness of the world—if, I say, such men were to declare they had received such truths, and in such a manner, from Washington—if they were to propagate their system throughout the vast continent of America, in opposition to the despotism of political institutions—and if, in this embassy of virtue and philanthropy, they were to sacrifice worldly interest and advantage, and expose themselves to poverty, misery and death—I am credulous enough to acknowledge that I should not have the philosophy or the absurdity to treat lightly their testimony. I should enquire whether the admission of the truth or falsehood of the story would involve the greater difficulty, and make up my mind accordingly—I should not “resist such a tale as the foregoing, because we regard the settled and inflexible course of nature as furnishing motives of conviction infinitely superior to those which result from any human testimony whatever;” for it might be a question, whether the conduct of the witnesses, on the supposition of their narrative being false, would not be as great a violation of the settled and inflexible course of nature as the miracle itself could be supposed to imply. For are not the MORAL LAWS of nature as immutable and constant in their operations as the physical ones; and are not the laws of the human mind an essential part of the laws of nature?

Now, as Christians, we believe (as the Deist says) that “the Deity *had* several important communications to disclose to his human offspring”—communications! essential to their existence, suited to their nature, and adapted to their circumstances; and consequently “it became necessary to resort to some stupendous method of conviction, and none appears to be better adapted to answer the purpose in view than a series of miraculous interpositions.” But all this is reckoned fallacious by “a Deist;” for, says he, “a principle is assumed which has not been proved, and which, in truth, has no adequate foundation in sound reasoning of any sort.” Now, I think, the principle *has been proved*—I think Christophilus has done it—he has introduced certain facts and effects, the existence of which is acknowledged—he calls for an adequate cause for their existence—no cause has or can be given but revelation—he reasons synthetically, from effect to cause—he finds the

miraculous interposition is necessary to explain the phenomena, and of course such interposition must pre-suppose the intention of Deity to communicate himself to man. But, adds the writer, "I ask (with great submission certainly) where the advocates of revelation gained their intelligence as to the intentions of Deity, with regard to the disclosure just alluded to?" Does he really ask for information? if he does, I answer (with great confidence certainly), from the SCRIPTURES OF THE OLD AND NEW TESTAMENTS.

It comes with rather an ill grace from "a Deist" to accuse us with assuming principles which have not been proved, when the whole of his first paper proceeds, as I have shown, on this kind of assumption; and when in the very next breath he asserts with almost as much confidence as St. Athanasius assumes in setting forth the dogmas of his creed, "that we know nothing of God or of his plans of present and future administration except from the visible works of nature." *Let him prove this, and he proves his point.*

Having noticed all that belongs to the argument in this letter of your correspondent, it was my intention here to have closed the subject; but my curiosity was excited by observing a letter in the magazine of last month, bearing the signature of "a Deist," and professing to animadvert on the Evidences of Revealed Religion, produced by "Christophilus." A superficial perusal of that production would justify the conclusion that it is by a different hand. It is deficient in all those marks of discernment and acuteness which are so conspicuous in the writings of "a Deist;" besides in the letter which we have just dismissed, the writer calls upon us (in rather an imperious manner to be sure) to "stand forward manfully, and not meanly and dastardly evade the question by pitiful subterfuges; and telling us, that the matter *has already been discussed*—that satisfactory answers have been given—that the objection, in short, *is stale* and unworthy of notice;" whereas this Deist commences his letter by adopting the very practice which the other had concluded with censuring. In speaking of the argument of Christophilus, he tells us that he has "said nothing which had not been said *a thousand times before*; and certainly would add (with his permission) quite as well." In point of argument, this writer appears completely poverty-struck; nevertheless, Mr. Editor, methinks I perceive certain traits of character which must compel us to identify him as the author of the previous papers; for no sooner do we perceive him touching his old string, "*the stability of the laws of nature*," than we know the gentleman again, notwithstanding the forlorn plight in which he stands before us. Thus the honest Vicar of Wakefield recognized the philosophical Mr. Jenkinson even

in a prison, the moment he began to dilate on his favourite theme the *cosmogony of the world*.

I confess, Mr. Editor, my expectations were raised, when I found that "a Deist" had condescended to notice "Christophilus" in the way of controversy, and that I was greatly though rather agreeably disappointed to find how abortive his attempts had proved, to fritter away the evidences of Christianity. It is with pleasure I reflect that the failure of "a Deist" cannot be attributable to his want of talent, but to this simple circumstance—the TRUTH of the system he opposes; and if Christianity be true, the most enlightened scepticism must assail it in vain!

Your correspondent informs us, he is "no enemy to the Christian religion," and I am willing to believe him, for no good man who understands it can be; but he objects to "its pretensions to divinity on a general principle, and not from any fixed or rooted antipathy to the system itself." Now it is possible "a Deist" may be mistaken in his general principle—to me it seems extremely exceptionable. But, adds he, "it is absolutely necessary to erect a standard against superstition somewhere, or to surrender to it at discretion." Allowed; and to us the plain, the rational, the philosophical system of Christianity, appears the most favourable situation on which to raise this standard; and the proof we give of this is, that priests, impostors, and enthusiasts, have combined their efforts to corrupt its truths and pervert its principles. "For this purpose (says the writer) the stability of the laws of nature affords an elevated and commanding post; a situation from which future philosophers will be able, if not to destroy the forces of the priesthood, at least to keep them everlastingly at bay." In this respect I can conceive no advantage that is not comprised in the Christian system—in the perfectability of the divine intentions, and the immutability of the moral government of the universe—and the Freethinking Christian, acting on its principles, and inspired by its spirit, will be second to no man in his opposition to the priesthood—he will be the foremost in the foremost rank to press upon their forces, and proudly expose himself to the brunt of the battle.

Now let us see what "a Deist" has to oppose to the argument of Christophilus—(p. 123) "As to the facts which your correspondent so exultingly refers to, they are all either easily accounted for on principles common to our nature"—here let us stop—the main point in dispute is, did the pretended witnesses of the resurrection of Jesus bear testimony to a *known falsehood*?—If they did, let the objector account for their conduct on any principle common to our nature—if he is capable of doing this, he may yet render the cause of Deism no inconsi-

derable service. But feeling the objection would return upon him, the writer attempts very dexterously to slip out of the argument by supposing that these facts are all either accounted for in this way, "or such as lose themselves in some of those rare and extraordinary combinations of events and circumstances, which the revolutions of numberless ages can hardly be expected to repeat." The gentleman may *lose himself* in his own dilemma, but the force of the objection must not be lost quite so easily—the argument comes into a small compass. Account for the facts if you please on any principle common to our nature—if you cannot, the *facts* must not be lost in any combination of events and circumstances, however rare and extraordinary—they must still have had an *adequate cause*. In the absence of all other causes then, we propose revelation as a cause commensurate to the effect; and agreeable to all the rules of philosophising, we insist that revelation must be considered as the *real cause* till some better one be assigned. The hypothesis is indisputable—the deduction is positive—to object to it is (to use the language of Mr. Burke) to elude truth and carp at conviction.

But will the gentleman really allow of facts which "lose themselves in some of the rare and extraordinary combination of events and circumstances, which the revolution of numberless ages can hardly be expected to repeat?" For myself I readily admit of them, but how will it square with his own scheme? what becomes of his arguments against revelation drawn from the "*usual course of nature*" and "*the settled order of events*?" May not all his insuperable objections to miracles "*lose themselves in some of those rare and extraordinary combinations of events and circumstances, which the revolutions of numberless ages can hardly be expected to repeat?*"

"Gibbon (says the writer) has most satisfactorily explained the causes by the operation of which Christianity spread with such unexampled rapidity through the vast extent of the Roman empire." Will "a Deist" specify a few of those causes—will he inform us how a company of illiterate fishermen were capable of propagating their system in a few years, to other nations and other tongues, when printing was unknown, and when the honest teachers of a persecuted religion had to gain a precarious livelihood by pursuing their ordinary occupations? When Christianity became corrupted, its spread is not so much a matter of enquiry; but in the primitive times, when its pureness and simplicity found nothing congenial with itself in the spirit and temper of the age or people among whom it was propagated, how, I ask, is its general diffusion to be accounted for?

The writer then reverts to the condition of the Jews, and

tells us, that "it is by no means difficult to trace with great accuracy and precision the effects of the Mosaic constitution upon their sentiments, customs, and manners." Why certainly all that the Jews were, as a people, is attributable to the Mosaic constitution, under which they lived—a constitution professing to have been appointed and ordained by God, and avowedly founded on the supposition that the Deity had revealed himself to man. Now if the Mosaic constitution was not appointed by God—if the disciples of Moses possessed no revelation of the divine will—how came they, an ignorant, a "barbarous people," to conceive such comparatively exalted notions of the Deity, of his existence, and attributes?—how came they in possession of *such a constitution*, which encouraged the best truths of religion and justice? for every constitution not appointed by heaven must necessarily derive its character from the character of the people. "Read (says a Deist) the Jewish history, or indeed the history of any barbarous people, and every page is crowded with supernatural events." Well then, if every other barbarous people have equally had with the Jews the advantage of supernatural interposition—show me any other "*barbarous people*" with such rational notions of philosophy, theology, and morality, as were common to the Jews—show me any other "*barbarous people*," whose ideas of the great first cause of nature were so simple, whose conceptions of the divine greatness were so sublime, whose sentiments of honour, of justice, of public faith, were so dignified—whose knowledge of the social and relative duties between man and man were so general. Nay, I might say more, show me any civilised, any enlightened and polished nation, contemporary with the Jewish, *who were* equal to them in these respects; and if you cannot, account for these phenomena—a variation in the effect must imply a variation in the cause.

Your correspondent, Mr. Editor, concludes with the burden of his song, the stability of the laws of nature. "The reasonableness of believing a fact which contravenes the settled laws of the world is, after all, unquestionably, the grand fundamental, leading matter of discussion." Well then, for mercy's sake, be it so; only let the writer try every thing by this rule—let him determine by this criterion, not merely what he rejects, but what he must consequently be compelled to believe—let him not be as credulous as he is sceptical—let him not strain at a gnat and swallow a camel, but let him attend to the argument of Christophilus on the resurrection of Jesus—and let him show, *if the fact did not take place*, that the conduct of the ostensible broachers of it is not an infraction of the settled and inflexible course of nature—is not contrary to all we know of human nature—is not a violation of all the laws

of the human mind—is not a disturbance of the usual course of moral events—is not in fact as great a miracle as the resurrection of a man from the grave. The moral miracle “a Deist” must be forced to believe, though it proposes no advantage—the physical one, which is designed to teach an important truth to man, and to develop a vast system of eternal beneficence, he rejects, because, to his limited capacity, it appears to contravene the settled laws of the world.

I shall take my leave of your correspondent with the words of Hamlet—

“There are more things in heav’n and earth, Horatio,
Than are dreamt of in our philosophy.”

Blackfriars Road.

W. C.

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PULPIT PREACHING NOT DEFENSIBLE ON THE GROUND  
OF UTILITY.

*To the Editor of the Freethinking Christians' Magazine.*

SIR,

NOTWITHSTANDING the difference of opinion that exists between your correspondent Juvénis and myself, I cannot but admire the frankness he displays in acknowledging the truth of a position which must be clear to every thinking Unitarian, although not one in a hundred will openly avow it—“that pulpit preaching, as practised in the present day is not authorised by any command, precept, or example of Jesus, or his apostles.” Being therefore agreed on the point of scriptural authority, we have only to examine it on the ground of expediency, or moral utility. Juvénis asks, if it be true that “he is not against us who is for us?” Undoubtedly it is; but what then? The man who intends to serve me cannot at the same time intend to injure me. But it does not follow, because he intends well that he will do well; on the contrary, with the utmost desire to serve me, he may pursue those means which will really injure me.

A physician, with the best intention of saving life, may administer that which will destroy it; and Paul thought he was doing God service when he endeavoured to destroy that which the Deity was establishing. It does not follow, therefore, because a man’s intentions are good, that the line of conduct he pursues must necessarily and consequently be correct: if indeed it be right, then the greater merit is due to him, inasmuch as he not only intended well, but he also did well. But if it be wrong, then although we cannot censure the man because he still acts from the best intentions, yet we must object to his means, as being incompetent to produce the end, and injurious to society. If then the intentions will not justify

the means—if from the imperfect state of our minds, and the numerous difficulties we have to encounter before we can acquire the art of accurately comparing and determining the weight of evidence, and of forming correct judgments—if from these circumstances it be possible that with good motives we may do wrong actions, then although the views of Juvenis in practising pulpit preaching be ever so pure and benevolent, his conduct still remains to be tried at another bar—at that which he has himself prescribed—the “welfare of man.”

Whatever produces the general happiness of man cannot be wrong, and if Juvenis can *clearly demonstrate* that such is the tendency of pulpit preaching, then pulpit preaching must be morally good, although it is not a Christian institution. But how can we determine the moral tendency of a practice but by looking at its effects? What have been the effects of pulpit preaching? Can Juvenis show us the moral excellence it has produced? If he can, then he will have at least one good plea in favour of the system.

Perhaps he will say it has been counteracted; why, truly, if ever it existed, it has been counteracted, and so effectually that not the least trace of it is left behind; and since it has been tried so long, so universally, and is found to be so compleatly inadequate to its professed design, surely upon this ground alone it is high time that some better plan were devised.

But what if we were to look for a moment on the conduct of those who have been the supporters and practisers of it—what if we were to see that some of the most direful calamities, the vilest practices, and the most cruel tortures that have ever been inflicted or imposed on man, proceeded from the body of pulpit preachers, would this be any recommendation in its favour? Juvenis will say, these things apply to the men, and not to the practice. True, Juvenis; but did you ever find a bad man in the habit of doing that which was good? Did you ever gather grapes from thistles, or figs from thorns?

Let us now examine the probable tendency of pulpit preaching, supposing it to be in good hands—supposing Juvenis to be the preacher. It will be readily acknowledged, that as it regards the human mind, where there is no stimulus there can be no exertion; and where there is no exertion of the mental faculties, wisdom cannot be acquired, and its consequent virtue cannot be practised. The first thing, therefore, to be attended to in the human mind, is to excite it into action. Is pulpit preaching calculated to do this? Where the congregation know that the task of instructing rests solely with their minister, what stimulus does it present to induce them to exert themselves? but it goes further than this—it is not satisfied with being deficient in the first and most impor-



tant point—it actually forbids, under civil penalties, the exercise of the mind ; for who dares open his mouth in a church or chapel, either to enforce any truth that has been stated, or to correct any error that may have escaped the notice of the preacher ? Pulpit preaching, therefore, viewing it in its most favourable colours, instead of being calculated to call the mind into action, positively debars it from exercise, and must of course be injurious to society. Let us again take it in another point of view : from the imperfect state of our nature we are continually making erroneous calculations, and pursuing wrong means, but it cannot be so with God. Whenever he proposes an end, the means that he takes will most certainly be adequate to his design. When he gave Christianity to man, his object was to make him wiser and better, and to fit him for the enjoyment of greater happiness ; and the line of conduct which he directed him to pursue (as given by Jesus and his messengers) was no doubt such as, if properly attended to, would answer the desired effect, and was also calculated for all ages, or otherwise he would have told us so. Why then should we wish to deviate from that plan ? And since we have it before us, why seek for any other ? what right have we to judge whether that mode which the Deity has prescribed to us be correct or not ? If we are satisfied it came from him, that ought to be sufficient ; and what business have we to inquire whether any better system can be devised, particularly before we have endeavoured to practise the one already appointed ? Juvenis seems to think that the organization of the Christian church, as delineated in the New Testament, is at present not practicable ; but the Freethinking Christian Society is a standing and living witness against this supposition. Besides, admitting even for argument sake that the original plan is not practicable, how can any man, with propriety, adopt a system or an institution which is not authorized by Christianity, and then call it Christian ?\*

Juvenis may possibly imagine that it is the wooden pulpit which excites the indignation of the Freethinking Christians ;

\* Christianity is what Jesus and his apostles TAUGHT, not what they forbade, or what they omitted to forbid. If we are permitted to incorporate with it any thing that we think may have a moral tendency, which is not positively forbidden, then all the paraphernalia of Popery and Mahometanism may be introduced upon the same principle ; for there can be no doubt but that each of these systems of superstition has had followers, who have piously thought their practices to be fully as useful as Juvenis does pulpit preaching, and they were certainly not more directly forbidden, for one of the best reasons, because they did not exist—nor quite so much, for although pulpit preaching is not expressly forbidden, because it was not known while Jesus and his apostles lived, yet a principle is laid down which actually opposes it—that of teaching one by one, &c.—and surely this is tacitly forbidding it.

but if so, he is mistaken. It is of no more consequence whether a speaker or speakers stand on a level, on a stool, or in a pulpit, than whether one is an inch taller than the other—it is not the pulpit, but the principle of what comes from the pulpit, that they object to—that of one man's teaching to the exclusion of the rest—a principle positively contrary to the direction of Paul, that they should all teach one by one, that all might be edified.

Juvenis perceives the impropriety of contending for both practices, as equally proper, and therefore states his doubts whether Paul's direction to the Corinthians ought to be considered as a rule for every nation; but if we look to it in its connexion, we shall find it to be a general rule given to the whole church, without any restrictions or exceptions whatever; and if it becomes a matter of doubt whether such directions are applicable to all Christians, why then the whole system of Christianity, as contained in the New Testament, may be swept away at once, for there is no part from beginning to end which is EXPRESSLY addressed to the Christian church in England.

From this short view of the subject, Juvenis may perhaps see that, in his support of pulpit preaching, he does not rest so firmly on the ground of propriety as before he might imagine; and if further doubts should arise in his mind, I shall be happy to meet them.

Your's, &c.

*Kingsland Road, Feb. 12, 1812.*

TIMOTHEUS.

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AN EXAMINATION OF THE ORIGIN, DOCTRINES, AND PRACTICES, OF THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND.

To the Editor of the Freethinking Christians' Magazine.

SIR,

I HAVE frequently remarked that your pages, unlike all other theological publications, are seldom occupied by severe or censorious remarks on the church of England, although you differ more widely from her than any other sect of Christians; and I have been informed that the cause of your silence has been, either that you have thought her doctrines and practices beneath your notice, or that she had not any pretence whatever to the title of a Christian church; and that being a mere political institution, it would be contrary to your principle of not interfering with politics to have meddled with her. But, Sir, since she has thus forced herself on our notice—since she does lay claim to the character of a Christian church, and has called upon the public to support an establishment for instructing the rising generation exclusively in her principles—she fairly becomes an object of examination. I, therefore, pur-

pose taking a general review of her origin, doctrines, and practice, that if she is deserving of support it may be given her; and if not, that every friend to true religion may have a proper and just ground on which to refuse that support, and to exert himself in defeating a design so pregnant with evil as such an education must be, if she can be proved to form a part of that antichristian church which God has threatened to destroy, together with all who receive her mark either in the head or in the forehead. In doing this I shall take for my criterion one of her thirty-nine articles, entitled, *Of the Sufficiency of holy Scripture for Salvation*.—"Holy scripture containeth *all things necessary* to salvation, so that whatsoever *is not read* therein, nor may be proved *thereby*, is not to be required of *any man* that it should be believed as an article of *the faith*, or be thought *requisite and necessary* to salvation."

Now let it be kept in mind, that the persons to be admitted into the school above-mentioned are to be instructed in the religion of the church of England; and if that religion should appear to be contrary to the scriptures, they are evidently violating this article—an article so just, that the real Christian can have no objection to any religion that perfectly accords with it.

The first point respecting this church I shall examine shall be its origin and founder; for surely every work that is of God must have originated from a virtuous cause, and must have had virtuous men for its founders: and here if we look into the history of England, we shall be sure to find a clue to our enquiry. It should appear that about the time of its origin, popery had so spread its baneful influence over Europe, that the Christian religion was completely buried in a heap of rubbish and priestcraft; but that to throw a glimmer of light over the dark scene, a few men at different times and in different countries, had started up and protested against the superstition and tyranny of the church of Rome; printing was invented; Francis the First and Charles the Fifth, for their own private purposes, pursued measures against the pope which emboldened enquiry; but persecution against heretics was still carried on in England with great rigour.

Henry the Eighth published a book, or somebody under his name, in favour of the seven sacraments, for which he received the title of Defender of the Faith, (i. e. the popish faith) which all our kings and queens from that day to this have retained, though they profess to be the opposers of that very faith for which Henry received the title. But notwithstanding the orthodoxy of Henry, a circumstance occurred in which this libidinous and blood-thirsty tyrant must either give

up his orthodoxy or his lust—a point which in his corrupt mind required no great difficulty to settle. He was tired of his wife, and earnestly entreated the pope to grant him a divorce, on the ground that his conscience could have no rest while he was the husband of his brother's wife; but the truth was, he had cast his lascivious eye on another woman, and at all risks determined to obtain her. The pope, from some political motive, refusing to gratify his wishes, he had recourse to all the universities in Europe to solve this delicate question. On this important business he employed a young and crafty priest, who favoured the reformers, probably because he had no prospect of rising in the papal church, whose name was Cranmer, and who now figures in the Book of Martyrs as having sacrificed his life in the cause of true religion.

But whoever will attentively read and scrutinize the character of this man, will be apt to doubt his claim to the title of *martyr*, and to rank him in the list of bloody persecutors; for, in the reign of Edward VI. two females were charged with heresy, for believing in adult baptism, and denying the doctrine of the trinity. Edward would fain have spared them, till urged by this man of blood, he consented to their death, on Cranmer's assurance that he would answer for him in the court of heaven. They were accordingly burnt in Smithfield for heresy, in that very place where this religious butcher afterwards (I was going to say, so justly) met the same fate. This, in my opinion, is sufficient to establish his character as a persecutor. Now let us see what claim he has to that of *martyr*.

On the death of Edward, Archbishop Cranmer and others contrived to raise a rebellion, with a design to set aside the legal heir to the throne. They failed in the attempt, and, as is usual on such occasions, the conspirators were, as opportunity served, seized, and he among the rest, so that had he suffered then it would have been for rebellion, not for religion. But Mary, willing to sink Cranmer in the estimation of the public, contrived by her emissaries to obtain his recantation of the Protestant faith; but it being afterwards hinted to Cranmer that he would suffer death, notwithstanding his recantation, he, to make a virtue of necessity, *recanted his recantation*, that as he must die he might obtain the character of a martyr. Thus was the old biter bit, and the crafty queen made a dupe of, and exposed to contempt, the crafty archbishop. It is said indeed that at the stake he put the hand that signed the recantation first into the flame as a punishment for the crime; but when we look into the circumstance that induced him to renounce his recantation, it becomes a question whether he burnt it first, because it had played the part of the fool or the knave; and

when we consider it was the same hand that signed the recantation which had before also signed the death warrant of the two unfortunate females, it would be more charitable to hope that the recollection of his conduct on that occasion rushed upon his mind in all its horrors, and to expiate that crime, and not his recantation, he thrust his hand into the flame. Here then, from the character of the man employed by Henry, we may see how fit he was for such a master, and for such a work; and we easily conjecture what must be the nature of a reformation from the superstructure founded by such monsters of iniquity.

Cranmer satisfied his master's mind as to the divorce, became a pander to his lust, and made that bed, which ought to have been a bed of thorns, comparatively, a bed of roses. Henry having thus acted in open rebellion to the pope, who was heretofore considered the head of the church, was obliged to break entirely with that power. The people were accordingly prepared for the change, by inculcating the idea that the pope was entitled to no authority beyond the limits of his own diocese; and Henry determined to carry into execution the necessary scheme of separating entirely from the church of Rome, and accordingly ordered himself to be declared by the clergy the supreme head of the church! "The parliament confirmed the title, abolished all authority of the pope in England, voted all tributes formerly paid to the holy see to be illegal, and entrusted the king with the collation of all ecclesiastical benefices," &c.*

Thus we see that avarice and lust were the causes of the reformation that took place by Henry's authority, and we shall find that the whole system has taken its tone from these principles, and that Henry's subsequent conduct all tended to confirm this idea. The king had no particular objection to the doctrine of the church of Rome—all he wished to remove was that which stood in the way of these two darling passions; for amidst all his zeal for reform he was anxious to be thought truly orthodox. The real presence in the sacrament was his favourite dogma, and all who adhered to the whole system of popery, as well as those who went farther than he wished, were equally subject to his implacable revenge. His grand object was to destroy the power of the pope, which stood in the way of his lust and ambition, and to seize upon the monasteries and rich revenues of the clergy, which enabled him to fill his coffers with a part, and to buy over the conforming clergy with the rest; and it is from this source that most of the church livings in England take their rise, so that this boasted reformation amounted to only a change of masters from that of a pope, "to a king with a pope in his belly;" for Henry never rested

* See Baxter's History of England.

till the parliament enacted that the king's usual style should be, "king of England, France, and Ireland, defender of the faith, and on earth the supreme head of the church of England and Ireland." This title might be allowed him and all our kings upon one condition, viz. that they would openly declare that they did not consider that church as a Christian church, but merely what the title professes, the church (Pagan, or whatever else they please to call it, except Christian) of England and Ireland; but when the supporters of that church tell us that to support *that* is to support Christianity, and to oppose *that* is to oppose Christianity, we are bound to compare their pretensions with their own articles and the scriptures; and in so doing, we shall find that Henry's pretensions to such title was in violation of both, and in direct rebellion against the majesty and sovereignty of Jesus. (Col. i. 18) "For he (Jesus) is the head of the church, who is the beginning, the first born from the dead, that *in all things* he might have the pre-eminence. —(Eph. i. 22) And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church.—(James iv. 12) There is one lawgiver who is able to save and to destroy." Here then we see that Henry's pretension of being head over the church is contrary to scripture; and their own articles inform us, that what cannot be proved by holy scripture is not necessary to the salvation or faith of any man. Of course, he was an usurper of the authority of Jesus; and I would ask, is it possible that that which began in usurpation, and has been perfected by fraud and oppression, can be from God, or worthy the support of any man, who acknowledges Jesus as his king and lawgiver, by God's appointment?

"But Henry was determined that his title should not be an empty one; for, by virtue of his ecclesiastical supremacy, he had appointed a commission, consisting of several bishops and other divines, *to choose a religion for his people*. Before the commission had made any progress in their undertaking, the parliament had passed a law, by which were ratified *all the tenets* which *should* be established by those divines, with the king's consent; in consequence of which a small volume was published, called the *Institution of a Christian Man*, which was received by the convocation, and voted to be the standard of orthodoxy. The king's caprice is discernible through the whole, and in reality, the book is to be regarded as his composition; but Henry, not long satisfied with this rule of faith, gave orders for composing a *new one*, entitled the *Erudition of a Christian Man*; and this, without asking the assent of the convocation, he published by his own authority. It differs from the *Institution*, but the king was no less positive in his *new creed* than he had been in his *old*, and required the faith of the nation to vary

with his own inconstancy. In both those compositions he was particularly careful to inculcate the doctrine of passive obedience.* Henry also published the Bible in English, under the following title, “the Bible in English, used and appointed by our Sovereign Prince King Henry VIII. *supreme head of the church.*”

Thus we see that Henry was the founder of the church of England, and whatever he said or unsaid, the parliament and priests in general uniformly followed and sanctioned; so that this church may be truly said to be a trinitarian church, promoted and established not by God, or Jesus his servant, but by king, lords, and commons—one in three, and three in one—which faith, if any man disputed, he was burnt in this world, and doomed to everlasting fire in the next.

In this unsettled state did the church continue during the reign of Henry, exhibiting a picture of murder, robbery, and oppression, by royal and clerical authority; but during the reign of Edward the Sixth, whose weak and infantine mind was made the dupe of artful priests and of bloody Cranmer in particular, this rough cub was licked into a little shape—and lost its power in the reign of Mary, when haughty and tyrannical bishops became, or pretended to become, martyrs to this new-fangled religion. But after her decease, the artful and tyrannical princess Elizabeth ascended the throne; and with her brought again what is called the reformed church of England, making it correspond as much as decently might be with the church of Rome, to bring in persons of weak and superstitious minds, who could not go all the way with her at once. She was a persecutor, and from her sprung the act of uniformity, with other obnoxious and un-christian regulations, such as now exist; and to support which we are called upon at this time to establish schools for the instruction of youth in these antiquated dogmas.

I trust I have now shewn the origin, cause, and founders, of the present established church; and if “figs can grow on thorns, or grapes on thistles;” if a fountain can at the same time send forth sweet and bitter, or fresh and salt, water; if a church that was founded and completed by the vilest of the human race, and originated from the most base and detestable motives, can be the church of God; then I say, subscribe liberally for a school to instruct the rising generation in those doctrines which the established church teaches; but if these things cannot be, then let every man of common sense withhold his support and countenance, and come out from among them, that ye be not partakers of her sins and of her plagues; fly to the scriptures, those fountains of living waters, and by

* Vide Baxter's History of England.

their sacred precepts regulate your lives and doctrines, and form the true church of God, who are called upon to look on and rejoice at the destruction of every anti-christian power, for it is God that has threatened to destroy them.

In my next, I purpose proceeding to examine the doctrines and practices of the church of England, if you shall account this worthy insertion; and with the most ardent wish for your success in the glorious cause you have undertaken—a cause which demands the support and good wishes of every friend to real Christianity, I am, Sir, your's, &c.

A FRIEND TO TRUE RELIGION.

QUERY.

To the Editor of the Freethinking Christians' Magazine.

SIR,

BY inserting the following Query in your magazine, viz.—
To what extent can a disposition for resisting insult be carried, without encroaching upon the principles of religion?—you will much oblige Your well-wisher,

London, March 3, 1812.

JUVENIS,

ON A REVELATION, IN REPLY TO MR. BURDON.

To the Editor of the Freethinking Christians' Magazine.

SIR,

CLAIMING the same privilege which is allowed to the opener of a parliamentary debate, I shall, without further preface, trouble you with a reply to Mr. Burdon's answer.

Mr. Burdon's reasons for denying *there ever was a revelation*, are, "because mankind are not agreed about that which is the true revelation; there many religions which pretend to that title, and there are millions of men who differ about them." But, because mankind differ about which is the *true revelation*, does it follow that there is *none*? As well might we say, because we hold different opinions concerning matters of taste, there is no standard of taste to which we can refer; or, because men differ on points of general jurisprudence, and in their interpretation of particular laws, there are no principles of equity, and no common nor statute law existing. And because some religions are impostures, does it follow that all are so? Is there no difference between the evidences for the Jewish and Christian revelations, and those for the religion of Mahomet or the Hindoos? Every one who has examined the subject, and is free from *prejudice*, will, I venture to affirm, answer in the affirmative.

Mr. Burdon goes on to say, “now a revelation of the will of God (having first *proved* what God is) must be clear and intelligible to all the world, or there can be no infallible criterion of such a revelation. And, considering that of the small portion of mankind who believe in the Christian revelation, not one million agree to understand it in the same sense, it follows inevitably, that it cannot come from heaven : if there never has been a revelation, the presumption is so strong as to be almost undeniable that there never will be one.” But why is it necessary to prove what God is? Is the knowledge of his essence necessary to establish his existence? No more I conceive, than a knowledge of the substratum of matter or of mind is requisite for a belief in their existence; and if he be allowed to exist, (and what unprejudiced person will not allow it?) he may reveal his will to us, in what form and manner he judges most proper. And though Christians differ in their interpretation of doctrines and particular texts of scripture, yet all agree in essentials, and in believing that their religion is a revelation from God, and that too from its evidences solely. Mr. Burdon’s premises therefore being, I apprehend, false, his conclusion is false also.

Mr. Burdon terminates his answer with saying, “as to the *direct and positive* evidences of Christianity, I know not what they are. I allow that it contains many good moral precepts,” &c.

Mr. Burdon is a university man, was intended for the church, a man of literature, and a scholar; and yet is ignorant of the direct and positive evidences of Christianity!!!—Why this is almost as extravagant an assertion, as that of Dupuis, Volney, and Paine,* which denies *the existence* of Jesus!!! to this it is unnecessary to reply; and as to whether Christianity contained good moral precepts, &c. it formed no part of my questions, and has been already answered by others.

Your’s, &c.

Blackfriars, March 10, 1812.

W. I.

* Though Paine in the first and second parts of his “Age of Reason” admitted the existence of Jesus, and called him a virtuous character and a reformer, yet in the third part lately published, he adopts the opinion of Dupuis and Volney.

ON THE STABILITY OF THE LAWS OF NATURE.

All this dread order break—for whom ? for thee ?
Vile worm !—O madness ! pride ! impiety !—*Pope.*

To the Editor of the Freethinking Christians' Magazine.

SIR,
THE design of this article is to illustrate the three following propositions : in the course of which illustration, opportunities will present themselves of referring, at least incidentally, to some of the strictures which appeared in your last number, on certain communications of mine.

First, That the laws of the world are, at present, absolutely fixed and uniform.

Secondly, That the laws of the world always have been fixed and uniform, since the creation to this day.

Thirdly, That no human testimony whatever can warrant a belief in miraculous agency, or divine interposition.

If I should succeed in establishing the foregoing particulars, the candid reader will perceive that the controversy is at an end ; if I should not succeed, it will then devolve on the advocates for revelation, to show wherein I have failed.

I have undertaken to prove, first, that the laws of the world are, at present, fixed and uniform. And here, by the way, I find it difficult to abstain from expressing my surprise, that, considering the advanced condition of knowledge, any gentleman, moderately instructed, should gravely beg to know, what is meant by a "law* of nature," and even to solicit a catalogue of such laws. In your next, Mr. Editor, the gentleman may very possibly desire to know, what is meant by *pen, ink, and paper*. The most compendious method I know of, to arrive at this kind of knowledge, is, to furnish himself with a dictionary. However, I perhaps cannot decently complain, when called upon for definitions, who have so unsparingly condemned others, for unintelligible and careless writing ; though, in the present instance, the demand should proceed only from a flip-pant pertness, or an insolent volubility.

By a law of nature, every body means—that order according

* We presume the writer is not aware that he is misrepresenting the argument, and misquoting the words of his opponent W. C. He not only substitutes the indefinite for the definite article, but uses the noun in the singular instead of the plural number, which entirely alters the construction of the sentence, and turns the point of the objection. W. C. has nowhere asked, what "a law of nature is ; but he wishes to be informed what "the laws of nature are"—that is, what is their nature and extent ? The whole tenor of W. C.'s letter shows that such is the information he seeks ; and we submit to the writer, whether there is not some difference between such a question, and asking—what is meant by pen, ink, and paper ?—*Editor.*

to which the Deity conducts any natural operation. Thus we say it is a law of nature, that the trees, in the latitude of England, should look green and beautiful in spring; naked and deformed in winter. That the longest day in June should exceed, by several hours, the longest day in December or January. That, in all latitudes, lead should sink in water; fire burn wood; and smoke ascend upwards. And nothing surely is easier, than to demonstrate the constancy and universality of these and similar laws. Does not the farmer, the chemist, the navigator, invariably proceed on the admission, that these laws are *immutable and fixed*? Does any man living question their stability?—I shall conclude this branch of my subject, therefore, by relating M. Richer's very interesting and curious experiment on the vibrations of a pendulum near the equator. A pendulum, like any other falling body, is acted upon by the force of gravity. Richer, who had been sent to Cayenne by order of the French king, on a voyage of observation, found that the pendulum of his clock no longer made its vibrations so frequently as in the latitude of Paris; and that it was absolutely necessary to shorten it about a line and a quarter, to make it agree with the times of the stars passing the meridian. This singular phenomenon led to a no less singular discovery; namely, the true figure of the earth. The philosophers of that time, adhering to the constancy of the laws of nature, justly concluded, that the variation in the pendulum's movement could not be the effect of chance, but must result from a diminution in the force of gravity, near the equator: and it is now known, by mathematical calculations, that the regions of the equator are in fact elevated above those of the poles nearly thirty-five miles.

I now proceed to show, in the second place, that the laws of the world always have been fixed and uniform.

I shall have occasion frequently to employ the word *experience*; as much has been said in regard to the proper signification of this term, I shall here, once for all, acquaint the reader with the precise meaning which I shall annex to it.

By experience, then, I mean, *our knowledge of those occurrences, which fall under our own immediate observation, and which are capable of being verified by a repetition, or an appeal to experiment.* Very closely allied to this, is the knowledge we derive from the experience of other people, when that experience implies nothing contradictory to our own experience of the laws of nature, and the usual succession of events. This simple statement will fortunately remove at once several objections which have been urged by our opponents, with a warmth and ostentation, certainly far beyond their merit. “And what are those laws of nature, (says the bishop of Lan-

daff),* which, you think, can never be suspended? are they not different to different men, according to the diversities of their comprehension and knowledge? and if any one of them (that, for instance, which rules the operations of magnetism or electricity) should have been known to you or to me alone, whilst all the rest of the world were unacquainted with it; the effects of it would have been new, and contrary to [different from] the experience of mankind; and therefore ought not, in your opinion, to have been believed.”—“Suppose that one of our modern aeronauts should tell a party of Indians, that, in England, seated in a convenient vehicle, he had frequently ascended from the earth, pierced the clouds, and travelled through the air with the utmost safety,” &c.† To these and all similar objections, the proper reply is, *let the experiment be made before competent witnesses; and the testimony received or rejected accordingly.* And even in cases where a direct experiment is not possible, we may often make considerable approaches towards certainty, by reflecting on the particular circumstances of the case in point, and by combining these particular circumstances with the known and acknowledged course of nature. For example; we gather from the writings of Tacitus, Pliny, and others, that the climate of Italy 2000 years ago was much colder, than it is at present. This, at first view, appears to contradict experience; but when it is recollected that, at the period referred to, gloomy forests and wide extended morasses covered a great portion of Italy, we not only admit the possibility of the fact, but we are quite sure, from the constancy of the laws of nature, that it must have been so. Wherever woods are cleared, and morasses drained, the climate uniformly becomes warmer. This is a law of nature.

In this way, it is by no means difficult to connect our own experience with the experience of past ages; and so to accumulate a force of proof which nothing can overcome. Galileo, in a former age, discovered the solar spots: and Cassini remarked, that these spots moved from east to west; the sun revolving on its own axis in twenty-five days, fourteen hours, and eight minutes. This is accurately the time in which the sun performs one of his revolutions *now*; and the spots also are still there, and may be seen by any one, with a good telescope, to-day or to-morrow. Several conjunctions and eclipses of the sun and moon are mentioned by ancient astronomers, (by Ptolemy for instance), which we know, from exact computations, must have taken place at the time specified: and these computations are founded upon the laws by which these great bodies are guided at this day. The diurnal and an-

* See Bishop Watson's Letters to Mr. Gibbon.

† See p. 143 of last number.

nual revolution of our own planet ; the ebb and flow of the tides ; the essential properties of air, and light, and water, and fire ; the colour and smell of many plants and flowers ; the shape and disposition of a multitude of animals : these all appear to have been always the same. And since the more solid and durable parts of nature exhibit unequivocal marks of steadiness and constancy, hence it follows, by irresistible necessity, that the inferior and dependant parts of nature must have always exhibited similar marks of constancy and steadiness. Nor will any one, I presume, hazard the violation of the rules of logical and just reasoning, so far as to assert, that, prior to the date of authentic history, the Creator probably governed the world by a different set of laws and regulations. That a being infinitely wise and powerful should set out with governing the world by one system of laws, and then suddenly change his mind, and govern the same world for the future by another system, is a supposition so big with every thing that is preposterous, not to say impious, that, for the honour of the human understanding, I will not suppose it possible to find any one capable of entertaining it.

Thus by a very natural train of thinking, we connect our own experience with the experience of former ages : and demonstrate the general stability of the laws of nature. I said *general* stability ; not that I mean to make any concession, or to recede, in the smallest degree, from the proposition with which I set out ; but only to intimate that I am aware of the distinction that is sometimes made in this part of the argument, namely, that the *general* stability does not exclude *occasional* disturbances, or miraculous agency. But this brings me to the third and last division of my subject, which is—

That no human testimony whatever, can warrant a belief in miraculous agency, or divine interposition.

A miracle has very properly been defined, *a transgression of a law of nature by a particular volition of the Deity*. This appears to be a convenient place to remark, that nothing can be more injudicious, as well as incorrect, on the part of gentlemen on the other side, than to represent a miracle as depending, sometimes, on the suspension or violation of a *known* law ; and sometimes, on the efficacy and operation of an *unknown* one. An uncommon appearance, resulting from the action of a concealed or unknown law, is not a *miracle*, if we would speak intelligibly. It may strike the ignorant beholder, indeed, as a miracle ; but it can strike no one else as such : subsequent philosophers see clearly, that the supposed miracle was either the effect of a law at that time not perfectly understood, or the consequence of a singular combination of incidents. But to return.

In every *common* cause, I take it for granted, we should consider a witness that reported a miracle, as unworthy of attention. The countryman, for instance, who told the people of Rome, that an ox had just spoken to him in the fields; all the nonsensical miracles of the Pagan world; all the legendary tales of the popish church; and all the wonders of modern methodism, are very properly considered, by every man whose intellects are not disturbed, as subjects only of derision and contempt. The only possible case in which a doubt can for a moment exist, is that of a miracle, or of an assemblage of miracles, said to have been wrought in attestation of some *grand disclosure*, fitted to promote extensively the good of mankind. This, I believe, to be a candid statement of the matter at issue. If it be not so, I shall be glad to see a more correct one.

But what is this grand discovery, which, it seems, it pleased the Deity to unfold for the benefit of his human offspring? what are these mighty expositions, which, it is confessed, could alone warrant any one, to listen for a single instant to human testimony in support of miracles? It would be indelicate to answer these interrogations: nor is it necessary. Be it sufficient that I remark, generally, that, whatever they are, they are derived, solely, from revelation; and that revelation rests, altogether, on the admission of miracles. If, Mr. Editor, any respectable correspondent should wish it, I will most willingly enlarge upon this part of the discussion, at any future time. At present we pass on.

In a former number of your Magazine, I had said, *that we know nothing of the Deity, or of his present or future plans of administration, except from the visible works of nature.* In your last number, a correspondent thinks proper to quarrel with this position. It is expedient, therefore, to open it out a little more. Let it be remembered, that we are speaking of the probability that certain communications would be made, on the part of the Deity; for it is in this connexion the proposition stands: and I had chiefly in my view Dr. Paley when I said this. For the doctor insists much and at large on what he calls the antecedent probability of the thing; and this antecedent probability, in his opinion, is a proper balance to the natural presumption against miracles; producing a sort of neutrality, as I imagine he would style it. Now it is very material to observe, that this *antecedent probability* is wholly void of foundation; that there is no appearance in nature which affords the slightest reason to expect the Deity ever would derange the plan of the universe, in order to reveal any secrets to human kind; and that the whole phenomena of the visible world evidently contradict this vain and delusive theory.

But even admitting, for the purpose of illustration, that the

importance of the truth communicated does in fact bestow a probability on the relation of a miracle performed in attestation of such a truth, which, otherwise, it would be ridiculous to allow to it; let us see, according to this rule of judgment, what will become of by far the greater number of miracles. All true believers, I presume, hold in equal veneration, or nearly so, the miracles of both testaments. At least they are not prepared to relinquish the five books of Moses. Well; let us attend to some of these: and really I wish to do it with due seriousness and consideration, for nothing I am sure is more distant from my intention, than to wound the feelings, or shock the piety, of any man. It is indeed a very material inconvenience attendant on the discussion of topics such as these, that we must touch lightly and delicately on many parts of the subject, and so fail in doing justice to our own sentiments; or, resolving to speak out, expose ourselves to the blind fury of the multitude; and be loaded with holy curses, as the vile traducers of our excellent religion. Yet every man has certainly a right, to investigate and examine; and, without some degree of openness and candour, our investigations are not likely to be worth much, either to ourselves or others. The reader will pardon this digression.

Open the book of Leviticus, or Numbers, or Deuteronomy, and read at a venture: and then solemnly ask yourself, whether a large proportion of these books does not contain matter—contain minute instructions and petty regulations—that are quite unworthy of the Supreme Being? There is one fact, connected with this subject, which has always appeared to me, absolutely conclusive—a fact, which good people never mention—it is this; that notwithstanding the extreme familiarity with which Jehovah is said to have conversed with Moses, not a word, not the most obscure intimation, seems to have escaped him, at any time, respecting *a future state, or the immortality of the soul*: though one cannot help thinking, that *these* are considerations, almost as important, as the TAKING OF BIRDS' NESTS. But not to cavil; let us proceed. I have said, that “a particular providence” (and your correspondent may add, *a particular revelation*, if he pleases) “is inconsistent with the natural perfections of the Deity.” This is denied. We must, therefore, revert again to proofs. Permit me in the first place to ask, how we are to learn any thing concerning God, but from the contemplation of his works?—a reference to revelation, in the present case, being of course irregular.

View then the operations of Deity, wherever those operations are accessible, and mark their grandeur, nobleness, and universality. Do you discover any thing like petty interruptions, or weak partialities? In every province of his exten-

sive empire, in the heavens, in the sea, on the land, is not the administration of his affairs conducted on a broad and liberal plan? And would any other mode of proceeding correspond in any degree with the perfection of his nature, or behove the high and lofty one who inhabits eternity?

What think you of that parent, the father of a numerous offspring, who should bestow his caresses on the eldest or youngest child only; disregarding the merits and affections of the rest? What think you of that prince, who should lavish his smiles and his favours on a few contemptible minions that surrounded his throne, or glittered at his levee; while the distant provinces, the great body of the people, neglected and forgotten, groaned under the oppressions of an unjust and cruel government? And if we consider the parent and the prince, whom I have just described, as proper objects of detestation, is it not a libel on the divine nature, to place that nature in a light in which it is impossible to view it, but with un-mixed abhorrence? Is it conceivable that God, the creator and governor, and judge of mankind, should withhold from them for 4000 years a communication which he always intended to make, and of which it was to the last degree important that they should be possessed? That at length, when the matter was laid open, he should pass by all the great and polished nations of the earth, and entrust it to the management and direction of a tribe of ignorant and hateful barbarians? And that even to this day, millions of our fellow men should have never heard of the business at all? Whatever may be the true character of the Deity, that character must be taken, in so far as we are competent to judge of it, from his conduct to mankind at large, and not from his supposed behaviour to one or a few favourite nations.

Upon the whole, we may very safely conclude, that the Deity carries on the government of the world, by stated laws;—that these laws are never disturbed;—and that no human testimony, in support of a miracle, is entitled to the least regard or attention.

I shall close these observations, by quoting a short passage from Mr. Hume's *Essays*; which appears to me applicable to the present purpose.—When we peruse the first histories of all nations, we are apt to imagine ourselves transported into some new world; where the whole frame of nature is disjointed, and every element performs its operations in a different manner from what it does at present. Battles, revolutions, pestilence, famine, and death, are never the effect of those natural causes, which we experience. Prodigies, omens, oracles, judgments, quite obscure the few natural events that are intermingled with them. But as the former grow thinner every page, in

proportion as we advance nearer the enlightened ages, we soon learn, that there is nothing mysterious or supernatural in the case ; but that all proceeds from the usual propensity of mankind towards the marvellous; and that, though this inclination may at intervals receive a check from sense and learning, it can never be thoroughly extirpated from human nature.

I am, Sir, your's, &c.

March 6, 1812

A DEIST.

CHARACTER OF MOSES.

To the Editor of the Freethinking Christians' Magazine.

SIR,

I SHOULD be glad to know, through the medium of your Magazine, your opinion on the third verse of the 12th chapter of the book of Numbers ; for I think it cannot be admitted as a fact, that it is Moses who speaks, without rendering himself truly ridiculous and absurd : for example—" now the man Moses was very meek above all the men which were on the face of the earth."

If Moses said this of himself, instead of being the meekest of men, he was one of the most vain and arrogant of coxcombs ; and the advocates for the books of Moses may now take which side they please, for both sides are against them. If Moses was not the author, the books are without authority ; and if he was the author, the author is without credit ; because to boast of meekness is the reverse of meekness, and is a lie in sentiment.

Your's, &c.

Cheapside, March 13, 1812.

D. T.

ON PRAYER.

To the Editor of the Freethinking Christians' Magazine.

SIR,

AS I perceive you do not object to publishing in your Magazine speculations on religious subjects, where the opinions entertained by the writers are materially different from those professed by the public at large, I request the favour of your insertion of the following thoughts on the subject of prayer.

It is now several years since I became satisfied, that prayer, whether social or private, is altogether irrational. I will give you my reasons for thinking so : it will be admitted, that the Supreme Being is a perfect being, possessed of perfect intelligence, perfect wisdom, and perfect goodness ; he cannot therefore be informed by us of any thing he did not previously know, neither can we offer him any advice as to the mode in which the affairs of the world should be conducted ; nor yet is

it to be supposed that he is to be wrought upon by intreaty, to produce effects which his wisdom and goodness would not otherwise have prompted him to produce—prayer, therefore, appears to be presumptuous.

But, I conceive, and I am by no means singular in this conception, that the government of the world is conducted according to certain established laws, commonly called the course of nature, and that the operation of these laws is never disturbed, except in the one case of miracles; so that the most important event and the minutest incident are equally the effects of natural causes. Any other supposition would argue a want of wisdom in the Supreme Being. It might be said, that he was incapable of appointing what should take place in subsequent periods, till he had seen the effect of his measures in preceding ones; besides, as all our knowledge is derived from experience, the laws of nature must be inevitably obscured, or mankind would be continually bewildered in their attempts to trace effects to their causes. Prayer, therefore, seems an attempt to procure an alteration of that which is unalterable.

I was not present when this subject was discussed at the Freethinking Christians' meeting, but I was informed that one of the speakers expressed an opinion that prayer was proper, as it might be the condition on which we received the different blessings of life. But does experience shew anything of this kind? Do we not find, on the contrary, that mankind obtain their different blessings by the employment of the natural means for that purpose? It is an opinion, I believe, commonly entertained by the Unitarians, and some other Dissenters, that prayer, though it produce no effect on the Deity, is useful on account of the devout disposition it encourages in ourselves; but is it not absurd to make a formal address to the Deity, intreating him to confer on us a variety of blessings, and avert from us a variety of evils, when, in fact, we have no meaning in what we are uttering?

It may be urged, that if prayer, strictly speaking, be improper, yet there can be no impropriety in expressing our gratitude for the blessings we have received from God; but is it necessary to put our ideas and feelings into words? Language is an expedient for communicating ideas between man and man, between whom no such communication could take place without the use of some such expedient; but, between man and his Maker, such an expedient must be absolutely superfluous, and therefore absurd.

Upon the whole, prayer (as I observed in the beginning of my letter) appears to me to be altogether irrational, and founded in a mistaken notion of the nature of the Supreme Being.

Your's, &c.

March 5, 1812.

J. S.

ON THE TRUTH OF CHRISTIANITY, IN ANSWER TO MINIMUS.

To the Editor of the Freethinking Christians' Magazine.

SIR,

CHRISTIANITY is of so much importance to individuals and society at large, that anything which affects it either directly or indirectly, anything which will tend as a further confirmation of its truth, or that may wear the appearance of invalidating its evidences, must have an imperious claim on the attention of the enlightened and virtuous mind. With this view it is that I have courage enough to take up my pen in defence of so excellent, so valuable, and beautiful a system as Christianity, in answer to a correspondent in your 13th number, under the signature of Minimus, who assumes the strangely inconsistent, though I am sorry to say not very singular, character of a Deist and a Unitarian, or a friend to the Unitarian scheme.

The writer, in order to undermine the general authority of the Bible, most artfully and deceptiously cloaths his own sentiments in the character of a stranger, and presents him to the view of his readers as a man who had never heard of Christianity—as a man who was totally ignorant of revelation—as a man who knew nothing of Jesus nor the doctrines which he taught; and yet, wonderful to relate, this stranger, totally in the dark upon all these subjects, had formed conceptions of the God of nature exactly consonant to what the Old and New Testaments contain. But before I reply to this part of the argument, it will be necessary to let the reader know who this stranger is—namely, a man just arrived in this country, and acquainted with “*the English language and no other*, but had never heard of the Bible.” Should this writer ever again make use of the same illustration, I would recommend him to add, that this stranger was a merchant—had a considerable quantity of goods to dispose of—supposed the metropolis the most likely place to sell them to advantage—arrives in a post-chaise and four from Plymouth, goes to the Royal Exchange on Cornhill, and enters into an agreement for their disposal. When this is completed, he takes breath, looks about him with astonishment, is struck with admiration at the statue that adorns the centre, and is highly gratified with the sight of all the good old dusty kings and queens that decorate the sides of this venerable building. When his curiosity is gratified, and his scientific taste satiated, he leaves the company of these merchants of the earth, regains the street, stares about with affrighted amazement, and communicates to his friend Minimus that he never heard there was such a place as London; but after a few days experience, he tells his kind instructor,

that it exactly agrees with his preconceived notions of so great a city.

This illustrious stranger is presented with a Bible, and told "that it contains a revelation from God to man." He, after reading it, wishes to know "what obligation he is under to receive it as a divine revelation." Let us here stop before we travel on with this writer through all the maze of his objections, and enquire whether *the Bible* lays claim to any such character as a divine revelation. I think it does not—it is Minimus's business to prove that it does. I know it is the common assertion of its strongest enemies, and its pretended friends; some of whom, in the height of their zeal, contend that every word was dictated by the finger of God—even where Paul asks one of his friends to bring his cloak from a place that he had left, to where he then was.

It may be unnecessary to inform this half and half man, that the Bible contains the writings of a number of *men* upon a variety of subjects, written at different times, principally recording the actions of men to whom God had revealed himself; but, as was very natural, considering their importance to mankind universally, and to Christians particularly, they were collected together, bound in one volume, and emphatically denominated the *Bible* or *book*. The Bible itself is the only criterion honest men ought to wish for when they speak or write concerning its contents, and not make Christianity chargeable with the errors of its most corrupt and pretended supporters.

In continuation of the previous quotations, the stranger is told, "that it is necessary he should become acquainted with the doctrines of the Bible, as thereon depends his happiness or misery in a future state." We ought to pity the unfortunate selection our author has made for the purpose of conveying his ideas. Let us for a moment acquiesce in the supposition that a man should be acquainted with the English language *only* and never heard of the Bible—let us in the true spirit of candor meet the writer's idea, although his mode of conveying it is so strikingly absurd as to involve a manifest impossibility. Let us suppose that in reality a person did arrive at Plymouth Dock, did meet with this very identical writer, and had never heard of the Bible (I suppose the writer means the doctrines it contains)—that this person had never heard either directly or indirectly, either by oral testimony or tradition, by his association with other men, or by any of those means which furnishes the human mind with its ideas—after supposing a character so completely ignorant of the Bible as the foregoing description implies, and that the declaration was made to him that his happiness or misery in a future life depended upon his getting ac-

quainted with its "sacred contents," the probability to me is, nay even the certainty, that he would not know what Minimus meant by a future life.

Let it be recollected that it was Christianity first brought this most important of all facts to light; consequently a man ignorant of Christianity could know nothing of a future state. But to say that his happiness or misery in the world to come depended on his being acquainted with revealed religion, is an assertion far beyond what the sincere and virtuous Christian would be authorised to make. All that he contends for is, that after an investigation into Christianity, and a belief of its truth, the motives are so strong and so well calculated for men in the present stage of their existence, that they will necessarily lead to virtue here and happiness hereafter. But to say what will be the future fate of those who have never heard of Christianity, or more particularly of those who have not only heard of it, but who live in a country and an age in which every facility is offered to ascertain its truth or falsehood, yet these advantages are neglected, and the neglectors disbelieve it—to say what will be the future destination of these and such like characters, is beyond the power of the true Christian to determine, and he will willingly leave the point to be disputed between Deists and enthusiasts.

Your correspondent then supposes (after the stranger had complied with his request), he tells him "that there are many good things in it (the Bible) exactly consonant with the opinions he had previously entertained of the God of nature." This is the grand point in debate, whether a man, being a total stranger to the Bible, completely unacquainted with its contents in any shape whatever, could arrive at this most important of all facts (the knowledge of but one God), without the assistance of revelation. Could the writer fairly prove his position, he would add the brightest laurel to the cause of Deism that ever has been won by its most valiant champions. Until Minimus accomplishes this, I shall rest satisfied (having the history of the world before my eyes), that as unassisted nature never did make the discovery so it never would have done. I am strongly inclined to think that had these Deists, these philosophers, these wise men, never enjoyed the knowledge which revealed religion has universally communicated to man, they would at this day have been most pious worshippers of the great goddess Diana; or had the republic of Athens continued to the nineteenth century, and these men been inhabitants of that city, likewise members of the Areopagus, it is more than probable they would have most eloquently contended that their studies of nature taught them there were 30,000 gods.

After this statement, the writer goes on to say, "that the Bible contains accounts which are altogether legendary, and to which he cannot possibly give credit." I wish the writer had told us what accounts they are which are altogether legendary; perhaps he means the history of the miraculous conception of Jesus, and all the other miraculous circumstances attending it. If he does, is he not in possession of the arguments of a Priestley and a Williams, who prove to the clearness of a mathematical demonstration, that the two first chapters of Matthew and Luke are gross forgeries? I cannot help reminding Minimus of the apparent dishonesty in his artful statement respecting the contents of the Bible.

Minimus, in his zeal to raise all the objections to Christianity which his memory and invention supply him with, tells us in a desponding manner, that he has not proper qualities for investigating this book—that he does not possess the advantages of learning, consequently cannot examine whether the English is a correct translation or not—that many great and pious men have differed about the meaning of this book, &c. and how can he expect to come more near the truth than they have done? I will first ask this writer, does the difference in the opinions of men, on the most common subjects, shut out others from investigating and determining for themselves? I would likewise hint to him, by the way, that it would be well were he to avail himself of the advantages which are certainly in his power. The advanced state of learning and enquiry has given the English reader several different translations of the New Testament; some of them by men of acknowledged talent, and sanctioned with the approbation of the honest and disinterested.

Proposition flowing out of proposition, and conclusion emanating from previous conclusions, Minimus asks, how is he to know "the different parts were written by the persons whose names they bear?" I must again complain of this writer's apparently not having taken the trouble to examine for himself, without taking up with objections that appear plausible, and that would apply universally to all antient writings. If he will read Paley's *Horæ Paulinae*, I think all his objections will be most satisfactorily answered on this head.

Your correspondent wishes for a "succession of miracles to preserve these histories pure and uncorrupt." If a miracle is a rare occurrence contrary to the *known* laws of nature, was there to be a succession of them, they would lose their peculiarity, consequently cease to be miracles. I now hasten to a close, by noticing the last and most extraordinary of all your correspondent's objections—how am I to know that these persons (the apostles) were qualified to ascertain the truth of what they

have related?" I will ask this querulous objector, whether he thinks the apostles possessed common sense or not? If he allows that they did, his objection is answered at once. Where, I will ask him, is the man whose mind is not deranged, but that could tell whether he saw a blind man receive sight, a lame man regain the free use of his limbs, or a dead man restored to life? That the apostles were *qualified* to ascertain the truth of these things, I should think even Minimus will not deny. In return, I will ask him a question—Supposing he had attended the execution of Colonel Despard, and saw his head held up by the hangman, accompanied with the usual exclamation, "behold the head of a traitor"—after this exhibition would Minimus be *qualified* to ascertain the truth of what he had seen or not?

I cannot close this letter without seriously recommending to all those who have burst the shackles of superstition, not to be satisfied with plausible arguments or superficial objections to revelation, but candidly and industriously to examine both sides of the question, recollecting the mighty importance of a system, which, when fully entered into, will form man every thing that his Maker intended he should be.

I subscribe myself a sincere friend to uncorrupt Christianity,
London, March 18, 1812. ALPHONSO.

To the Editor of the Freethinking Christians' Magazine.

SIR,

IN contemplating the rapid progress made by the Freethinking Christians in theological knowledge—so much superior to all other sects—it is natural to enquire the cause that has produced this singular effect; and this I think may be found in the Address presented to that society by the committee who arranged their laws, when first they were formed into a Christian church.

In that address there are such principles laid down, that in my opinion any society acting upon them, however ignorant they might be in other respects, could not fail of meeting with the same success.

Under this impression I think you would be doing a service to Christianity, if you were to publish it in your useful Magazine.*

A FRIEND TO FREE ENQUIRY.

ADDRESS TO THE CHURCH OF GOD, CALLED FREETHINKING CHRISTIANS.

IT is with peculiar satisfaction that your committee, through an indulgent providence, are now enabled to present to you

* In compliance with the wishes of our correspondent, we here insert the address alluded to.—*Editor.*

the result of their labours, ; and they contemplate, with gratitude, the goodness of God, who has caused such ample instruction to be treasured up in the New Testament, so varied and diffuse, as to answer all the exigencies of the Christian, whether in his private capacity, or in the fellowship of the gospel.

The laws now selected and submitted to the church not only prove the excellency and sufficiency of the scriptures for our government—but, if attended to, cannot fail to wean us from all preconceived opinions, and promote that unity of sentiment among us, so necessary to our welfare ; and while we fully expect to behold the happy effects they will produce among ourselves, we are ready to anticipate the pleasing influence their beauty and consistency will have upon the minds of Christians in general ; and we trust our conduct will evince, that a close adherence to the laws of Christ has a tendency not only to strengthen the bond of union, but to render it indissoluble ; for we are fully persuaded, that where men are divested of party views, and an attachment to human traditions, the commandments of Christ must meet with universal acceptance, especially as it is generally admitted that the doctrines of Christ and his apostles form the most beautiful system of ethics, calculated in the highest degree to promote universal philanthropy and peace. And although we do not yet behold all the effects such a system might be expected to produce, it must be evident, that, wherever the gospel hath been received (notwithstanding the veil thrown over it by tradition), it hath ameliorated the manners of mankind.

One of the greatest obstacles to Christian philanthropy arises from the contrary opinions and contracted views that professors entertain of the character of God : which instead of acknowledging him to be (as the scriptures affirm) the father of his creatures, a being of infinite purity and impartiality, frequently represent him as a hard master, who makes distinctions among his creatures, merely for the purpose of displaying his sovereign power ; electing some of the children of men to the highest enjoyment and felicity, while he is regardless of the rest ; leaving (if not absolutely decreeing) them unceasingly to feel the direful effects of his wrath ;—a doctrine that not only reflects the highest dishonour upon the character of Jehovah, but is subversive of all morality and virtue, being the principal prop of infidelity, and that which furnishes the strongest arguments against revelation : for it may be truly said, if any of the doctrines taught in the scriptures have a tendency to set the attributes of Deity at variance, the divinity of their origin-al may justly be questioned.

In tracing the various directions of Christ and his apostles,

and the particular evils they were calculated to guard against or cure, your committee think they have discovered many of the sources of those corruptions with which the church of God hath been deluged : for the fondness of some in adding something to the simple doctrines of the gospel, on one hand, and the negligence and supineness of Christians in resigning their right of judgment on the other, seem to have opened the flood-gates of error ; while the setting up one man exclusively to teach such doctrines as are calculated to please the party he is employed by, or to support the tenets they avow, has spread the contagion far and wide ; especially where emoluments have been annexed to the priestly office, which too often influence to *interest* rather than *duty*, inclining men to court the applause of their patrons, rather than promote the cause of truth ; especially as the true design of public preaching was not to instruct the church, but, by travelling from place to place, to call sinners to repentance, who, upon giving proof of their faith and sincerity, by a submission to the ordinance of baptism, were to be united to a church, to be further instructed in the doctrines of the gospel ; such practices, together with the scriptures having been represented as open only to those who possess the key of knowledge (human learning), have served to rivet the chains with which men have bound themselves, rendering the cloud of ignorance, with which they have been enveloped, by these means still more impenetrable.

We trust, however, this veil will shortly be removed, and that men will be inclined (with us) to contemplate the scriptures with admiration, where the character of Jehovah is set forth, and his designs in providence and grace made known in so glorious a manner as to prove his wisdom, power, and goodness ; and that the revelation we are favoured with is worthy of his character, and perfectly adapted to the condition of man ; for unless these points can be established, it does not appear how gainsayers are to be withstood, particularly such as contend for the exercise of the reasoning faculties ; for it appears to us that the proper basis of truth is the reasonableness and necessity of it ; and, when recommended by these, it becomes incontrovertible.

Your committee are persuaded that it was the glaring errors in the doctrines of the church of Rome, and the tyranny of priests, that first produced a reform : but as all reformations were guided by, or have since dwindled into, party zeal, no partial alteration in doctrine or discipline, can answer the purpose of delivering the church of God from the shackles of superstition : and under this impression, they think nothing less than a return to first principles can dissipate error, and promote the knowledge and love of truth.

If the feeble attempt now made should have a tendency to unite Christians together, and influence them to follow our example, by conforming to such laws as the scriptures enjoin, pure and unmixt with human invention, we shall have cause to rejoice, as such a conduct cannot fail to produce the most beneficial effects; for as error first crept in from a disregard or inattention to the commands of Christ and his apostles, a return to a simple obedience thereof is the only means whereby a purity of manners and a uniformity of sentiment can be produced, such as characterized the first Christians. And should so desirable a change be effected, it is to be hoped that the mistakes of former ages, and the direful consequences thereof, will serve to secure Christians in future from departing from the simplicity of the gospel, as the punishment of Israel in their captivity cured them of idolatry.

The necessity and advantage of a church established upon such principles, cannot but be apparent, where every sentiment can be freely investigated, abstracted from party views or interested motives—where also the grand fundamental truths of the gospel are strenuously contended for—a privilege, which, having been given up, has been the true reason of the exaltation of error, at the expence of truth. And here it is necessary for us to point out the difference there now is in the design of the church of God from that at its first establishment; for in the first ages of Christianity it was to preserve truth: but now, by a laborious attention to its true nature, and the nicest examination of every thing presented to us under that name, to search it out, thereby to exhibit it to the world in all its native simplicity and loveliness.—Now also the church is the school where young converts are to be instructed in the doctrines of the gospel, which, while they serve to guard them against a fondness for men and their opinions, from viewing their fallibility, enable them clearly to discern the commands of Christ from the dogmas of a party; at the same time enforcing the necessity of maintaining good works, thereby to shew forth the praises of him who hath called them out of darkness into marvellous light, and lead them to improve and exercise those gifts which God bestows upon his church for the edification thereof, by provoking one another to love and good works, and not leave that to the priest which is the privilege of every Christian brother; for we are persuaded, that every church, however small its gifts, is fully competent to its own wants, independent of a hired preacher.

Not to enlarge upon the benefit of a society formed upon the proper equality of its members, and the limited authority of those who bear rule therein, who are accountable to the body for the due charge of the duties of their office, and for whose

benefit (not their own emolument or ambition) they are elected; we cannot omit calling your attention to the excellency and beauty of the Christian doctrines and discipline, inculcated in your laws; a submission to which cannot fail to advance the glory of God, the cause of religion, and your honour as a church; for though a small body, with inconsiderable talents, under many discouragements, professing to be governed thereby, you stand forward as advocates for the unity of the Deity, the universality of his love, for rational religion, and free inquiry; acknowledging also the supremacy of Christ as the only head of the church, and way to the Father; influenced by whose bright example, and following whose precepts, you now determine to walk as strangers and pilgrims in this world, unbiassed by its customs, and uninfluenced by any honour or advantage it may present; patiently waiting for the reward of your fidelity in the kingdom of Jesus, when he shall claim the heathen for his inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for his possession.

By acting up to the spirit of your laws, you cannot fail to become good subjects, good husbands, good wives, good parents, good children, good masters, and good servants; for by thus filling our several stations in society, and submitting to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake (when such ordinances do not militate against the commands of Christ), and following peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man can see the Lord, you will prove yourselves the true disciples of Jesus; for as his kingdom is not of this world, you are restricted from bearing arms on any account, and ought not to interfere with the politics of the world; but rather, as the followers of the Prince of Peace, recommending his doctrine by your examples; as by so doing, you cannot fail to enjoy peace in this life, and ensure your happiness hereafter.

While your committee rejoice at the prospect of the success of their labours, they are sensible much remains to be done; being convinced that it is possible the laws now presented may still need some addition to comprehend every thing necessary for the direction of a church of God; but they flatter themselves, however defective the selection may appear, it will evince the consistency and harmony of the scriptures, and shew the necessity of their being better known, and of an implicit submission to them, as the best means of promoting our real happiness. They therefore indulge the pleasing expectation, that this partial view of the subject will incline men to make the holy scriptures their study.

Although every thing necessary to establish these laws may not be set down at large, your committee have endeavoured to select what appeared best adapted to the various heads under

which they are arranged, referring to such other parts of scripture as tend to confirm the matter more fully; in some few instances they have added texts that apply to local circumstances and antient customs; but where these occur they have generally endeavoured to explain their view of them by a note annexed; therefore, upon the whole, entertain an earnest hope, that while the church accepts these laws as the rule of their conduct, their labours will not only be acceptable to them, and be in some sort a memorial of their attachment to their service, but in the end, will be highly beneficial to the Christian world; serving as a sufficient proof of the excellency of the revealed religion of Jesus; a submission to which will be the best defence against the baneful influence of infidelity, as well as tend to erect a glorious standard of truth for all serious and enquiring Christians to rally under and flee to, during the desolating judgments that are about to be poured forth upon the anti-christian nations; for the cry is gone forth, "Behold the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him," and therefore we ought to attend to the voice of the angel uttered in Rev. xviii. 4—"Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues;" for the time is at hand when such as are built upon the foundation of the prophets and apostles will be manifest, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone, and when a distinction will be made between him that serveth God and him that serveth him not.

What is subjoined under the head of Bye Laws, relates only to such regulations as every society stands in need of; designed to provide for certain contingencies, for which specific directions appear to be laid down in the New Testament, and apply to such rules as have been thought necessary to prevent a perpetuity of office, from whence we conceive many corruptions have sprang. Commending, therefore, the laws to the cordial acceptance of the church, as a sacred deposit of the truth, as far as our minds have been led, and them to the special protection of the God of truth, whom we pray to keep and to protect us, we subscribe ourselves your servants in the gospel of his son,

THE COMMITTEE.

ON THE AUTHENTICITY OF THE SCRIPTURES.

To the Editor of the Freethinking Christians' Magazine.

SIR,

AS an admirer of the principles of the Christian church of which you are a member, I take the liberty of addressing this letter to you, and of begging your patience in perusing it.

Having been educated in the principles of the established

church of England, I attended that form of worship from infancy to maturity, when time and reflection presented to my amazed faculties, the glaring inconsistency of those creeds to which I had hitherto yielded a tacit belief.

Disgusted with the absurdity of the established church, and inanimate uninteresting discourses of the preacher, I separated myself from that form of worship, in the hope of meeting with some sect, more rational and consistent. It is unnecessary to state the various tenets of the different sects to which, from an impartial motive, I attended; suffice it to say, of all I have heard and reflected upon, those of the Unitarians operated most forcibly on my mind. But a great obstacle in the way of my belief was, from the various pretensions of the different sectaries, each arrogating to himself the infallibility of his doctrine—I had imbibed a very strong doubt as to the authenticity of the scriptures.

Chance had directed me to the Freethinking Christians' society, when they first commenced their lectures or disputations in Cateaton-street: from the sophistry too evidently displayed in their commencement, I expected but little reformation or conviction from a society apparently inconsistent with themselves. Having again lately attended their church in the Crescent, Jewin-street, I was surprised and delighted with, to my thinking, the great improvement both in the principles and abilities of the speakers! In short, Sir, from the free and candid manner yourself and friends in general treat those subjects which come under your investigation, I am induced to apply to your's as the only church or set of men professing Christianity, from whom I can hope for a candid answer to that question, which is the present stumbling block in the way of my belief, namely—the authenticity of the scriptures.

It may be expected of me to state on what ground I reject or disbelieve the authenticity of the scriptures; and here I claim but little merit to myself in what I shall advance. The few crude ideas which from reading and reflection presented themselves to my mind, I have found the most ably explained and enlarged upon in M. Volney's *Ruins of Empires*; and I must refer you to that book for a better elucidation than I can attempt to give. When I reflect on the great similitude between the scriptures and the religious books of the heathen world, it seems evident to my mind that the charge of plagiarism must attach somewhere. The Christian charges the Mahometan, "with having travestied the histories of the Old and New Testament, into the most absurd tales; that the majority of ideas on which his religion is founded, existed for a long time before it; and that it is nothing more than a confused mixture of the Christian and Jewish religion, which

an ambitious man made serve his projects of dominion and worldly views." In like manner the disciple of Zoroaster charges both Jews and Christians with "having adopted the principles of his great master, namely the immortality of the soul, or a life to come, the revolt of the principal angel, heaven and hell, ideas unknown to Moses, and which constitutes the present theology of both Jews and Christians." And the Hindoo asserts the antiquity of his religious books as prior by many thousand years to all the rest.

As Bramanism, particularly one sect of it, is more similar to Christianity, than any other religion, I shall take the liberty of quoting the words of M. Volney, on the subject:—"In the beginning (said the Lama of Thibet), there was one God, self-existent, who passed through a whole eternity, absorbed in the contemplation of his own reflections, ere he determined to manifest those perfections to created beings, when he produced the matter of the world. The four elements at their production lay in a state of mingled confusion, till he breathed upon the face of the waters, and they immediately became an immense bubble, shaped like an egg, which when compleat, became the vault or globe of the heavens, in which the world is inclosed. No sooner was the earth and the bodies of animals produced, than God, the source of motion, bestowed upon them, as a living soul, a portion of his substance. But of all the substantial forms, that of men is most pleasing to the divine being, as most resembling his uncreated perfections; and man, when by withdrawing himself from the commerce of the senses, he becomes absorbed in the contemplation of his own nature, discovers the divinity that resides in it, and himself becomes worthy of divinity. Thus is God incessantly rendering himself incarnate. But his greatest and most solemn incarnation, was 3000 years ago, in the province of Cassimere, under the name of Fôt or Beddou, for the purpose of teaching the doctrine of self-denial and self-annihilation." "The Lama proceeded to detail the history of Fôt, observing that he had sprung from right intercostal of a virgin of the royal blood, who, when she became a mother, did not the less continue to be a virgin: that the king of the country, uneasy at his birth, was desirous to put him to death, and caused all the males who were born at the same period to be massacred; that being saved by shepherds, Beddou lived in the deserts to the age of thirty years, at which time he opened his commission, preaching the doctrine of truth, and casting out devils: that he performed a multitude of the most astonishing miracles, spent his life in fasting and the severest mortifications, and at his death bequeathed to his disciples the volume in which the principles of his religion are contained." The Lama began to read, "he

that forsaketh his father and mother (says Fôt) to follow me, shall become a perfect Samanean (a heavenly being)," &c.

The Christians may well charge this sect of Hindoos with plagiarism, but the Hindoos (says M. Volney), "supported by all the chamans, bonzis, gonnis, talapoins of Siam, of Ceylon, of Japan, and of China, demonstrated to the Christians, from their own theologians, that the doctrine of the Samaneans was known through the east upwards of a thousand years before Christianity existed; that their name was cited previous to the reign of Alexander, and that of Boutta or Beddou, could be traced to a more remote antiquity than that of Jesus." The Hindoo then charges the Christian to demonstrate the authenticity of his religion by any such historical monuments of antiquity as they have adduced; and asserts that the gospels were taken from the books of the Mithrag of Persia, and the Essenians of Syria, who were themselves only reformed Samaneans.

The great similiarity between those books and the gospels have been remarked by Christian missionaries, and M. Volney asserts—"there are absolutely no other monuments of the existence of Jesus Christ, as a human being, than a passage in Josephus, a single phrase in Tacitus, and the gospels. But the passage in Josephus is unanimously acknowledged to be apocryphal, and to have been interpolated towards the close of the third century; and that of Tacitus is so vague, and so evidently taken from the depositions of the Christians before the tribunals, that it may be ranked in the class of evangelical records. It remains to enquire of what authority are those records. 'All the world knows (says Faustus, who though a Manichean, was one of the most learned men of the third century); all the world knows, that the gospels were neither written by Jesus Christ, nor his apostles, but by certain unknown persons, who rightly judging they should not obtain belief respecting things which they had not seen, placed at the head of their recitals the names of contemporary apostles.' This sagacious writer has demonstrated the absolute uncertainty of those foundations of the Christian religion, so that the existence of Jesus is no better proved than that of Osiris and Hercules, or that of Fôt or Beddou, with whom (says M. de Guignes) the Chinese continually confound him, for they never call Jesus by any other name than Fôt."

It would be swelling this letter to a treatise, to state all the objections that might be made against the authenticity of the scriptures. It is the opinion of many learned critics, that the book of Genesis in particular was not written by Moses, but is a compilation digested by the Jewish rabbis, after their return from the Babylonish captivity, containing in it the Chaldean opini-

ons respecting the origin of the world.—I cannot desire or expect that you should prove to a demonstration, on which side the charge of plagiarism ought to be placed, or whether Moses was Bacchus, or Noah Deucalion, &c. ; but briefly on what authority we ought to receive the scriptures, particularly that part of them entitled the New Testament, as the work of inspired writers ; or whether the Christian religion is only a refinement on Paganism.

Considering the idea of religious worship as originating in the wants of man, who first supplicated protection from the power of the elements, afterwards as his mind became expanded and his reason refined, the science of astronomy took its rise : man having figured to his imagination the form of animals in the celestial sphere, under an idea of their influence on the terrestrial, began to worship them on earth : hence the adoration of the Egyptians to animals, which gave rise to the Pagan system of idolatry ; and as the world became more enlightened, the Jews refined on the Pagans, the Catholics on the Jews, the Protestants on the Catholics, the Dissenters on the Protestants, the Unitarians on all the other Dissenters, and with justice may I add, the Freethinking Christians on all who have preceded them.

If the New Testament, as before stated, cannot claim to be considered as the work of inspired writers ; yet much praise is due to those men who in the present infatuated age, shall endeavour to clear it from those mysteries and inconsistencies which have been interpolated, and to reduce it to a pure refined system of beneficent morality—to a guide which simply and clearly points out the path of virtue, and instructs mankind to “ look through nature up to nature’s God.”

We may pity those infuriated bigots to superstition, who have shed so much blood in the propagating their principles ; and while without persecuting or annoying any man in his religious profession, we endeavour to “ do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with our God,” we may with propriety add, in the language of Pope,

“ For modes of faith let graceless zealots fight ;
His can’t be wrong whose life is in the right.”

If, Sir, the foregoing observations are considered worthy insertion, you will please to give an explanation of the question proposed, through the medium of your Magazine, and you will oblige several persons, my friends, as well as

Your’s, &c.

March 23, 1812.

P.

THOUGHTS ON THE TRIAL OF MR. D. I. EATON, FOR PUBLISHING THE THIRD PART OF PAINE'S AGE OF REASON.

"If then men should be permitted amongst us, to go on delivering their sentiments freely in matters of religion, and to propose their objections against *Christianity itself*; I apprehend we have no reason to be in pain for the event. On the side of Christianity I expect to see, as hitherto, the greatest share of learning, good sense, true wit, and fairness of disputation: which things, I hope, will be superior to low ridicule, false argument, and misrepresentation. This victory, obtained upon the ground of argument and persuasion alone, by writing and discourse, will be honourable to us and our religion; and we shall be able to reflect upon it with pleasure. We shall not only keep that good thing we have received, but shall deliver it down to others with advantage. But a victory secured *by mere authority* is no less to be dreaded than a defeat. It may appear a benefit for the present; but it really undermines the cause, and strikes at the root of our holy profession."—*Dr. Lardner.*

To the Editor of the Freethinking Christians' Magazine.

SIR,

TO notice the passing events of the day, which connect themselves with the interests of religion, is the business of every one who thinks religion of importance to the well-being of society. Such being the opinion of the individual who now addresses you, he presumes the subject on which he is about to offer a few thoughts will not be considered incompatible with the nature and design of your publication.

There is, in my opinion, an unpardonable supineness with regard to public occurrences, in which many good disposed persons indulge. The quietest jogs through life, with his eyes fixed on the ground, without exchanging a word with his fellow-travellers on the road, or knowing, or caring whether the prospect around him is dreary or picturesque. What's the news? eagerly enquires the flippant newsmonger of the day; not that he thinks it concerns him to know—not that he seeks to enlarge his mind—to extend his knowledge of men or things—or to draw *his own* conclusions from the general aspect of affairs—no!—but his head is like a broken cistern, which must be filled every-day—the news of yesterday has all run out, and he will remain dry and empty unless he takes in a fresh supply to-day—he seizes with avidity that wonderful thing called a newspaper—runs through the list of bankrupts—looks at the head of the law reports—dozes over the parliamentary debates—reads the summary of politics—falls into the reasoning, and adopts the opinions of the editor as his own—praises the prowess of Wellington—execrates the villainies of Bonaparte—admires the virtues of the Regent—dispatches embassies to foreign courts—defeats armies—and settles the fate of nations; but if a customer calls to pay a bill, or the ser-

vant informs him dinner is ready—away goes domestic and foreign politics—Soult and Wellington—princes and pugilists—bankrupts and members of parliament—judges and juries—special pleaders and sharpers—births and deaths—marriages and executions together---and to-morrow he's as eager as ever to *know the news*.

But the sober moralist considers no circumstance unimportant, which transpires within the sphere of human society ; he marks each passing event—observes the general tendency of things—pursues the courses of truth and error, as they cross, separate, and unite, in the multifarious transactions of life—looks at man as he is, when stript of the garb of sophistication and deceit—and imbibes a just mode of thinking from the free exercise of his mind on every subject. Such a man cannot always rest satisfied with pitying popular prejudice, or smiling at consecrated absurdity and licensed oppression. The generous impulse of truth dilates his heart and animates his breast ! and the voice of justice and of nature cannot be stifled !—But why do I generalise, when my subject is simply the late prosecution and trial of a bookseller for publishing the third part of Paine's *Age of Reason* ?

When we observe the avidity with which the laws of our country have pursued deistical writings in general, and Mr. Paine's in particular, we are naturally led to ask, on the broad subject of prosecution, for what is called blasphemy of the holy scriptures ?---is it prudent—is it just ? On the score of prudence, I would observe, that the moment a prosecution is commenced against any work, it is a sure mean of bringing it into notoriety, and extending its circulation. People are curious to learn what are the contents of that book which has occasion for the interference of the law ; and thus a production, which, if left alone, would have been condemned to oblivion, is forced upon the notice of those who would never have heard of it. There is little doubt but the legal proceedings against the former parts of the *Age of Reason* doubled the number of its readers. Mr. Eaton, the defendant in the present action, is a bookseller : he is aware of this---he anticipated no doubt the present prosecution, and calculated the consequences. It was purely a speculation on his part, and the Attorney-general has been so impolitic as to further his design. Another consequence attending these sort of prosecutions is, that either the *name* or the *thing* is so much like *persecution*, that many intelligent good sort of people can hardly see the distinction ; they are apt to confound the one with the other, and the individual thus *persecuted* (I had nearly made the mistake myself in the first syllable), however sinister may be the motives, and unworthy the intentions from which he acts, is considered an injured

man, and excites commiseration, when he would otherwise have experienced contempt.

The ostensible purpose of this trial is to suppress infidelity and to support religion, but its effects are just the reverse. Religion blushes at the thought of being protected by the arm of the law, and infidelity exults to see such protection necessary. If infidelity has gained its thousands—the prosecution of infidelity has gained its tens of thousands. But if we ask, on what principle of justice it is that the sceptic is brought to the bar of criminal jurisprudence, the question assumes a more serious shape. Is it because the propagation of their opinions are dangerous to the good being of society? (so says Mr. Attorney-general, and so I think)—I think true or false opinions necessarily promote or deteriorate the happiness of man; but who shall presume to determine what opinions are, and what are not, dangerous to the well-being of society? It might happen that one set of men would find it more their interest to support one system of religion than another; for instance, the Romish divines might find their interest in Catholicism, and even our Protestant ministers, and our Protestant lords, and our Protestant judges, and our Protestant Attorneys-general, might find something more than their spiritual welfare in cherishing mother church!

But it may be said, that society must determine on this important point for itself—that is, determine by its representatives and delegated authorities. The answer is, that whatever rights men may be supposed to give up to the social compact, yet there are certain indescribable rights which are eternal in their nature, and which no human associations can annihilate or abrogate—such is the right of private judgment, and the free enjoyment of opinion. But if we were to admit the principle, that society is competent to fix the standard of religious opinion, what would be the consequence?—of course all opinions not entertained by the majority would be proscribed; and what might not be the fate of those who happen to be in the minority? What would become of the church of England, whose members are very far from being the majority of the nation? Down would go the bench of bishops, and all the orders of the clergy would be disbanded to-morrow—but, no! the principle is inadmissible---mind must go free!—The spirit of the British constitution cherishes this generous freedom—the mild laws of England do not presume, generally speaking, to interfere with opinions, though evidently prejudicial to the well-being of society. So tolerant are the times in which we live, that sentiments the most dishonourable to God, the most immoral in their nature, and the most iniquitous in their consequences, are suffered to be taught---the worship of the ONE

LIVING AND TRUE GOD is forsaken for idolatry and polytheism—a swarm of men, the most obnoxious to intellectual attainments, are allowed to glut on the rich spoils of industry—the most absurd sectarians are tolerated—consecrated ignorance addresses the multitude as the oracles of heaven—and holy madmen are suffered to be at large. Now then existing establishments demonstrating the lenient nature of our laws, and proving that opinion is not settled by the state, but that on the contrary nothing is so base, so absurd, or so unreasonable, but what is allowed to be taught and to be practised---is it not hard upon infidels that they alone should be singled out by the law as obnoxious to public good? that their light artillery should not be suffered to annoy us, whilst so many engines are at work against us, and so many heavy batteries opened on every side to beat down the common sense of mankind!

There is something in our nature that recoils at the exertion of power against argument—to deny that liberty of opinion to others which we assume to ourselves, is a species of injustice not to be endured—that every individual has a right to exercise his judgment unrestrained, and that no coercion should be used to suppress opinions, however wild and sophistical, is a position so self-evident, that no argument can render it more so. In support of this position, the greatest names might be brought, and the most respectable authorities adduced. I know that the sound of a name cannot justify that which is unjustifiable, and that the authority of a bishop cannot make truth more true; but still it is pleasant to find, that even bishops have sometimes declared themselves in favour of principles which are founded in justice, and consistent with the rights and liberties of mankind.

Dr. Lardner, in addressing himself to the Bishop of Chichester, in answer to some observations the bishop had made in a letter to him, concerning his reply to Mr. Woolston, observes, “Your Lordship freely declares he (Woolston) ought not to be punished for being an infidel, *nor for writing at all against the Christian religion*, which appears to me a noble declaration. If the governors of the church and civil magistrates had all along acted up to this principle, I think the Christian religion had been before now well nigh universal.” And the Bishop of Landaff declares a similar sentiment to Mr. Gibbon:—“It would give me much uneasiness to be reputed an enemy to free inquiry in religious matters, or as capable of being animated into any degree of personal malevolence, against those who differ from me in opinion. On the contrary, I look upon the right of private judgment, in every concern respecting God and ourselves, *as superior to the controul of human authority*; and have ever regarded free disquisition as the best mean of

illustrating the doctrine, and establishing the truth of Christianity. Let the followers of Mahomet, and the zealots of the church of Rome, support their several religious systems, by damping every effort of the human intellect to pry into the foundations of their faith; but never can it become a *Christian* to be afraid of being asked a reason of the faith that is in him; nor a *Protestant* to be studious of enveloping his religion in mystery and ignorance."—But what can appear more truly inconsistent than that after the writings of Paine and of Woolston had become subjects of controversy—after Iardner had replied to one, and the Bishop of Landaff to the other—after the Bishop of Chichester had declared that Woolston ought not to be prosecuted for his infidelity—after the Bishop of Landaff had made this manly confession to Mr. Paine, "If you have made the *best* examination you *can*, and yet reject revealed religion as an imposture, I pray that God may pardon what *I* esteem your error. And whether you have made this examination or not, does not become *me*, or *any* man to determine."—Yet that immediately after this, the writings of both these men should be proceeded against by law—after they had been confronted by the force of argument, they are suppressed *by the argument of force*.

When will the zealot have the sense to leave religion to rest on its own merits, and to recommend itself to society by its own intrinsic excellence? Is it because Christianity is true—is it because it is of divine origin—is it because its evidences are almost irresistible—is it because its doctrines are consistent with the most enlightened philosophy---is it because its morality is sublime, and its precepts worthy all acceptance, that therefore it cannot stand against the drivelling of scepticism, or the sophistry of infidelity, without being protected by the shield of civil authority?---Are the arguments against Christianity specious and delusive? let them be published to the world that they may be refuted---are they vulgar and scurrilous? let them not be honoured with notice---let scorn be their portion, and general contempt their reward.

But it may be said, that writings of this description are calculated to do mischief with the weak or ignorant, by bringing religion into disrepute. Such was the argument of Mr. Erskine, as counsel for the crown, in the prosecution of Williams, for publishing the former parts of the *Age of Reason*. "I can conceive (said the orator) a distressed but virtuous man, surrounded by children, looking up to him for bread when he has none to give them, sinking under the last day's labour, and unequal to the next, yet still looking up with confidence to the hour when all tears shall be wiped from the eyes of affliction, bearing the burden laid upon him by a

mysterious Providence which he adores, and looking forward with exultation to the revealed promises of his Creator, when he shall be greater than the greatest, and happier than the happiest of mankind. What a change in such a mind might not be not be wrought by such a merciless publication !”

It is not denied that such publications may do some mischief—but the question for a wise legislator to determine upon is, whether the attempt to suppress them by pains and penalties will not do much more. Besides, when we consider the extensive and expensive establishment employed by the people of this country for the express purpose of supporting religion—when we calculate how many thousands are educated and set apart for the avowed end of teaching the truths of the gospel—when we know that the obscurest village has its church—when we see the glittering spire in every direction of the metropolis, and the conventicle in almost every street of the city, the weak or the ignorant believer ought not to be known in this country—we should all of us by this time be men in Christ, and rooted and grounded in the truth. If it be true, as Judge Hale and Lord Kenyon have asserted, that “the Christian religion is part of the law of the land”—its truths must have enlightened the human mind, and have ameliorated the condition of society. Considering how many centuries the spiritual and secular powers have gone hand in hand, one would have thought that ignorance would long ago have been banished from the land, and that the veriest clown should be able to detect the fallacy of the objections to his belief, and ready to give a reason concerning the faith that is in him.

Frail indeed must be that system which shrinks from the sight of enquiry, and recedes from the touch of opposition—such, I am bold to say, is not Christianity—but such is every religion which requires the support of civil authority. The true disciple of Jesus disdains to appeal to any authority but reason and evidence---he will not join in the hue and cry raised by the bigotted and the corrupt against principles and opinions, which, however noxious in themselves, are innocent, compared with those which stand opposed to them. If he is told that Mr. Paine was an infidel, he will pity him---if it is urged that he denied altogether that Christianity came from heaven, he will attempt to prove, by argument, that it did---if it is said that he represents the morality of the scriptures as mean and pusillanimous, he will prove to him, by his actions, that he is mistaken.

As for the existence of sceptical writings, they are to be dated principally to this very system which is so sedulous to suppress them. Priests may thank themselves for all the wit and argument and railery which has been levelled against

Christianity ; and as long as the mystery of iniquity remains, so long must the flaming sword of the law turn every way to protect it.

The publication which has excited the present prosecution is from the pen of Mr. Paine : it appears to have been printed a few years ago in America, and recently in this country by the present defendant, D. I. Eaton. This production, as an attack on Christianity, is, in my opinion, extremely trifling, very inferior to the former writings of the same author, and much more positive in its tone, and dogmatical in its spirit. Mr. Eaton is its editor as well as publisher ; he professes to be an admirer of Paine's religious opinions—informs the reader that the work was printed a short time prior to the author's death, and contains his real and unprejudiced opinions in his last moments of existence. Whether this is intended to give a greater degree of weight to Mr. Paine's arguments, like the dying experience of fanatics is adduced by the ignorant survivors as evidence of the truth of their belief, I cannot say ;—but with me it weighs nothing how Thomas Paine died, or how John Wesley died---I would rather hear *how they lived* ! A man may live and die a sceptic or an enthusiast---it only proves the strength of his prejudice, not the truth of his opinions---it is simply this, after all---that he died as he lived, in a mistake ! Nay, if a man were even to recant his opinions in his dying moments,* it would not follow that they were erroneous on that account. Truth or falsehood is founded in the agreement or disagreement of things, and not in the strength or fears of dying men.

In examining this pamphlet, we find that if the author did not give up his religious principles, yet he evidently changed his opinions before the close of his life. In the former parts of the *Age of Reason*, the author fully believed in the existence of Jesus, and professed to admire him as a virtuous and amiable man ; but in the present he discovers reason to create a well-founded suspicion that “he did not even exist as a man ;” and we all recollect how he abused Moses as a vain coxcomb, on the supposition of his having said of himself that he was the meekest man---but in this work, when Paine favours the

* The writer does not wish to give the least degree of plausibility to the lying stories about Mr. Paine's death. Awful accounts of the deaths of infidels are a favourite species of composition among the Methodists—they are like last dying speeches and confessions—written perhaps before the demise of the party. A number of these stories may be kept manufactured on hand, and when it pleases the Lord to send an infidel to the Devil, the name and date can be immediately filled up, and the narrative sent forthwith to the press to comfort the faithful. No doubt many a pious soul could have given a full, true, and particular account of the death of poor Paine twenty years before it happened.

public with what he calls his "private thoughts of a future state," he modestly concludes by saying, "this is my opinion ---it is consistent with my ideas of God's justice, and with the reason God has given me, and I gratefully know he has given me a large share of that divine gift."

It is but justice to this production to say, that it is not totally destitute of merit : the dissertation on dreams is ingenious ; the remarks on Newton's "dissertations on the prophecies" are witty ; the examination of the passages quoted from the Old Testament in the forged chapters of Matthew and Luke is not badly carried on, though the whole story of the miraculous conception of Jesus has been refuted by the firmest believers in the scriptures, with much more talent and force of argument, than Mr. Paine has displayed on the subject. And here I must remark, that throughout the pamphlet there is a palpable deficiency in that candour which ought to characterize every enlightened writer---opinions and principles are ridiculed as Christian which form no part of Christianity, and against which Christians themselves are reasoning and writing every day.

Upon the whole, this work cannot produce any other effect than to fix more firmly the truths of Christianity in every intelligent mind ; and those who are in danger of being carried away by its argument, are not worth being kept from infidelity. Christianity itself is not touched by any thing the author has advanced---it is "reviled without being understood, and denied without being examined." But, it seems, this book shocks the piety of the Attorney-general---this godly man cannot endure it. I certainly have one serious objection to it myself---it cost me three shillings, which is about three times its value. It might be a very laudable undertaking, if the clergy were to publish a sixpenny edition for the benefit of the poor, that they might be induced to change the religion of their country for the RELIGION OF JESUS, and be enabled to smile at the impotent objections to that divine system.

The remarks on the speech of the Attorney-general and on Lord Ellenborough's charge to the jury, shall be reserved till my next ; but I wish to place the subject in a proper light to my readers, before I quit it for the present. The actions of men may appear widely opposed to each other, when in reality they spring from the self-same principle---Sir Vicary Gibbs defends the Bible, and opposes the Age of Reason---Daniel Isaac Eaton opposes the Bible, and defends the Age of Reason. The motives that induced the Attorney-general to interfere in the affair need not be named---and the Bookseller published his work---to sell !

Your's, &c.

A FRIEND TO TRUE CHRISTIANITY.

EXTRACTS FROM A PORT-FOLIO.

[Communications for this Article are particularly requested.]

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## SECTARIANISM NOT CHRISTIANITY.

**H**OW much professors of Christianity have attended to the teaching of the apostles let every one judge—let them compare the present state of Christianity with what the Apostle Paul says in his first epistle to the Corinthians (iii. 2), “For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.” But at this time the numerous sects and parties, each of them are built on another foundation from the Papist to the Unitarian. The Catholics are not Christians, for the popes of Rome are their foundation; the members of the church of England are not Christians, for Luther and Cranmer are their foundation; the Arians are not Christians, for Arius is their foundation; the Calvinists are not Christians, for Calvin is their foundation; the Methodists are not Christians, for Wesley and Whitefield are their foundation; the Quakers are not Christians, for Fox is their foundation; the Sweedenborgians are not Christians, for Sweedenburgh is their foundation; the Southcotonians are not Christians, for Southcot is their foundation; the Unitarians are not Christians, for Priestley is their foundation; neither is any other sect or party Christian which lays any other foundation “than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.”

## REASON.

A reverend Doctor in his preaching was contending loudly for reason—for the free use of that which distinguishes man from the beasts; but in a softer tone he immediately said, “My friends I would not have you misunderstand me—though reason be good, yet we must not follow it so far as to deny the faith of the son of God, as established by the great founders of our faith, Fletcher and Wesley.”

## OATHS.

Wherever men of uncommon energy and dignity of mind have existed, they have felt the degradation of binding their assertions with an oath. The English constitution recognises in a partial and imperfect manner the force of this principle, and therefore provides, that, while the common herd of mankind shall be obliged to swear to the truth, nothing more shall be required from the order of the nobles than a declaration upon honour. Will reason justify this distinction? Men will never act with that liberal justice and conscious integrity which is their highest ornament, till they come to understand what men are. He that contaminates his lips with an oath, must have been thoroughly fortified with previous moral instruction, if he be able afterwards to understand the beauty of an easy and simple integrity. If our political instructors had been but half so judicious in perceiving the manner in which excellence and worth were to be generated, as they have been ingenious and indefatigable in the means of depraving mankind, the world, instead of a slaughter-house, would have been a paradise. What are the words which we are taught in this instance to address to the creator of the universe? “So help me, God, and the contents of his holy word.” It is the language of imprecation. I pray him to pour down his everlasting wrath and curse upon me, if I utter a lie.—It were to be wished that the name of that man were recorded, who first invented this mode of binding men to veracity. He had surely himself but very light and contemptuous notions of the Supreme Being, who could thus tempt men to insult him by braving his justice. If it be our duty to invoke his blessings, yet there must surely be something insupportably profane in wantonly and unnecessarily putting all that he is able to inflict upon us upon conditions.—*Godwin.*



## LAWS.

The essence of right and wrong does not depend upon words and clauses inserted in a code or statute book; much less upon the conclusions and explications of lawyers; but upon reason and the nature of things, antecedent to all laws.

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## THE SPIRIT OF CHRISTIANITY COMPARED WITH THE SPIRIT OF THE TIMES.

If the great founder of Christianity were to descend on the earth, with what indignation would he behold the heads of his ministry invested with wealth, with patronage, and *political power*!—With what indignation would he behold the cringing, the meanness, and servility of the subaltern clergy towards their superiors—to see his mild disinterested religion coupled with political faction—to see worldly preferment their only pursuit, and the sacrifice of independence and public virtue and honour the only means of attainment—to see the most lofty ambition, the most selfish avidity, the most persecuting spirit of tyrannic ascendancy concealed under the colour of sanctity and the garb of hypocrisy! Well might he ask what part of his sacred writings authorised his ministers to rank themselves at the head of the opulent lords and most puissant princes of human creation, instead of that self-denial, that humility, that meekness, that contempt of riches and honours, which he preached in every line of his gospel.

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## ORIGINAL POETRY.

## SILENCE.

WRITTEN ON THE SEA SHORE.

UPON the shores a death-like silence reigns,  
And placid calmness holds the ocean's wave;  
No sounds disturb the stillness of the plains,  
No voice re-echos from the deepen'd cave,  
But solemn silence reigns.

Save when the screaming sea-fowl takes her flight,  
And seems the gloomy influence to bewail;  
Save when the lark's shrill carols give delight,  
Caught in the murmurs of the passing gale,  
An awful silence reigns.

Or when, against the smooth and sandy shore,  
Dashing with splashy sound, the rippling wave  
Is heard a moment, and then heard no more—  
Stealing it's course like mortals to their grave,  
Still solemn silence reigns.

On such a spot let contemplation dwell,  
Here swell the bosom with enraptur'd praise,  
Virtue must here its former course excel,  
And Vice abhor the folly of its ways,  
While such sweet silence reigns.

For here no busy din, to towns confin'd,  
Molest the ear to meditation giv'n;  
No earthly calls arrest the pious mind,  
That rises on the wing of hope to heaven,  
Where great Jehovah reigns.